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THE MEMOIRS OF MARSHAL JOFFRE

VOLUME TWO





MARSHAL JOFFRE.

# THE MEMOIRS OF MARSHAL JOFFRE

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VOLUME TWO

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**PART THREE**

**THE WAR OF STABILIZATION**







## CHAPTER I

### *A GENERAL SURVEY OF THE YEAR 1915*

BY THE middle of November, 1914, the battle in Flanders was drawing to a close. The front, already stabilized from Switzerland to the Oise, was assuming a like character from that river to the sea.

My intention of enveloping the German right had not been entirely realized. We had merely succeeded in retaining, in itself no small result, the French coast of the English Channel, a narrow strip of Belgian territory and a part of our northern coal basin. On the other hand, we had lost Lens, and the valuable centres of Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing, whilst the Germans still held on to Noyon, less than 65 miles from Paris.

The best and largest portion of the German army was on our soil, with its line of battle jutting out a mere five days' march from the heart of France. This situation made it clear to every Frenchman that our task consisted in defeating this enemy, and driving him out of our country.

My views, on this matter, remained unchanged during the whole time I was directing operations. While far from denying that the other theatres had their interest and value, I consistently refused to attribute to them the importance with which some people sought to invest them. This, however, by no means implies that I did not give my earnest attention to the fronts of our Allies, or to the theatres which were gradually developed in the eastern Mediterranean and in Asia. Indeed, whether it was a question of aiding the British to open up the Dardanelles, or of succouring the valiant Servians at Salonika, the French Army always took its share in overseas operations, and in Salonika this became a preponderating one.

If I could never lose sight of the responsibility I had assumed of defending the soil of my own country, the matter of secondary operations was a source of constant thought; but, to my mind, the advantages they offered were almost wholly theoretical, while the dangers they presented were real and present.

During 1915 and 1916, therefore, I remained true to the principle of keeping as many French troops as possible in the main theatre of war, for it was here that a decision must necessarily be sought. On every occasion, also, I urged our British allies to follow my example and maintain the principal part of their forces on the Western front.

At the end of 1914, it was evident that the interests of the Anglo-French forces dictated a renewal of the offensive as soon as possible. It was imperative to prevent the Germans from organizing positions in front of us, to force them into open warfare again, and finally drive them from the territory they held in France and Belgium.

However, it was clear that, in the form of warfare which circumstances had forced upon us, the question of war material would play a rôle far more important than anyone had ever anticipated. For this reason, before beginning an account of the operations of 1915, I will describe the situation which obtained in this respect at the opening of that year, outline my successive requests for more material, and show what progress was realized in its production.

But, if the future seemed bristling with new problems for us, those confronting the Germans were, to my mind, still more perplexing, and this belief went far in sustaining my confidence in the future.

The Germans, supported by an ally who already showed signs of weariness, were obliged to make war on two fronts. It is true that their admirable railway system, which prolonged the lines leading from Belgium and northern France, enabled them to move an army corps from one theatre to the other in less than twenty days. Their problem, however, lay in deciding where to direct their effort. Should it be against their Western opponents, whose strength they had just gauged; or against their Eastern foes who, though less well equipped and organized, had at their disposal a vast territory into which they could fall back and recuperate, in the event of defeat?

Faced by these alternatives, it seems apparent that the Germans had no clear perception of the best line to follow. Their reluctance to play for a high stake is manifest and, even after the striking success achieved over the Russians, they let the occasion pass for undertaking a decisive offensive.

In 1915, they chose a middle course. This consisted in maintaining the greater part of their forces in the West, though standing on the defensive, and attacking the Russians with such troops as could be safely spared from the Western front, supplemented by others furnished from internal resources. Such a solution, to my mind, bears the imprint of a general

unwilling to take a resolute decision. It also goes to show that the efforts made by the British and French during the strenuous year of 1915 were not put forth in vain. The proof lies in the fact that we were able to maintain the initiative, while the enemy was constantly held under menace of attack. This will appear more clearly when I come to the short account of the Franco-British operations, although I will follow my usual practice of closely confining myself to my own personal part in them.

It is none the less true that, failing decisive results, which they neither sought nor hoped for in 1915, the Germans did organize themselves to meet our attacks. Fortified by powerful industries which remained undamaged, and aided by an abundance of coal and the supplies they obtained from neutrals, they set in operation, at the same time as ourselves, a gigantic plan for developing their matériel and strengthening their defensive system facing us.

To sum up, the struggle on the Western front during 1915 presented the aspect of a race between our offensive matériel and the German defensive organizations, both of which increased in strength with every week that passed.

This year offers another characteristic in that the war became extended to the eastern Mediterranean, whereas in 1914 it had been confined to the Franco-Belgian theatre, Poland and Servia. I will describe how these new theatres were developed, some on the initiation of the Entente, others by the action of our enemies; and I will explain the measures I was called upon to take, indirect at the outset and direct in the end, for the purpose of co-ordinating our efforts in those theatres.

I will close this part of my Memoirs by a brief sketch of my relations with the Government and politicians during the year.

*THE ORGANIZATION OF THE FRONT—  
THE MUNITIONS PROBLEM*

THE last stages of the battle in Flanders coincided with the retirement of the German armies in East Prussia, and of the Austro-Hungarian armies in Poland. On November 10, 1914, our Intelligence Service reported large movements of German troops. It seemed certain that the equivalent of 4 or 5 army corps and 5 cavalry divisions had been withdrawn from the front in France and Belgium.

The moment, therefore, appeared to be a most favourable one for the renewal of our offensive. Before, however, undertaking any new combined operations, it was essential, after a battle which had been going on continuously for three months, for reserves to be constituted, ranks filled up and a stock of munitions accumulated. Special weapons and appliances also had to be provided for the siege warfare forced upon us and which had to be carried on until such time as open warfare could be resumed.

The most urgent of all these tasks was the withdrawal from the front of the larger units required for the operations I had in mind. On November 12th, I issued instructions<sup>1</sup> for all defensive organizations to be pushed to completion, so as to reduce the number of troops in the line, and enable local reserves to be constituted.

Commanders of the larger units were reluctant at first to take the steps indicated. The idea seemed to prevail that trenches could only be defended by cramming them full of men. The result was that, for the most part, reserves were constituted at first in small numbers only, suitable for corps rather than army reserves. More satisfactory progress was made in the Northern group of armies whose front was shorter in proportion to their strength. This group succeeded in forming a reserve for each army and, in addition, one for the group itself. This last reserve, in accordance with my prescription, consisted of "... troops of excellent

<sup>1</sup> Note No. 2668 of November 12, 1914.

quality established in the neighbourhood of weak points. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, by employing Territorial units in the front line, we were able to withdraw a like number of active or reserve units.

Sir John French's forces had been considerably increased, and he now held a front of thirty miles with four army corps, whilst many of our corps occupied as much as ten and one-half miles. I, therefore, instructed General Foch to request him to relieve the French Eighth Army, which was interposed between the British and the Belgians. The Field Marshal offered no objection to the principle involved, but the execution of the relief began only in January.

However, towards the end of November our defensive organizations were on the way to completion and the number of troops in reserve was slowly increasing. The reserves to Groups of Armies amounted to 2 infantry divisions, 2 cavalry divisions and 2 Territorial divisions. The cavalry which had been moved into Flanders had resumed its normal place in the order of battle. The two cavalry corps and the cavalry divisions had been re-formed, and the corps regiments had rejoined their army corps.

The thinning of the enemy's front and his decreased activity seemed to indicate that it would shortly be possible to take the offensive. What supplies of war material did we have at this period? What measures did I take to ensure a successful outcome to our operations? What progress was made in the supply of munitions? I will deal with these points before giving an account of the operations in 1915, taking first of all matériel and then ammunition.

At the outset, one point must be made clear. The crisis in munitions, which made itself felt after October, 1914, has been taken to prove that the Higher Command was lacking in forethought, which is entirely contrary to the facts.

I said in the first part of these Memoirs that in 1910 I had drawn the attention of the War Minister to the necessity of developing our heavy artillery,<sup>3</sup> of increasing our supply of ammunition<sup>4</sup> and of calling largely on private manufacture, so as to lessen, as soon as possible, our inferiority to the Germans in this respect. I explained how considerations of a purely political nature prevented my requests from being fully complied with. If our demands for munitions had been met in time, we might have been able to gain such a victory in September or October, 1914, as

<sup>2</sup> Letter No. 4 of November 17, 1914.

<sup>3</sup> See Part I, Chapter I, pp. 3 and 4; and Appendix to Part I, p. 585 *seq.*

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix to Part I, p. 590 *seq.*

would have driven the Germans out of France. I will only say one more word on this subject. It is that the people, or, in any case, their leaders, are too often prone to look upon military expenditure as unproductive and useless. The inevitable result of such a policy is that the enemy is allowed to gain a big start so that, when the crisis does come, it is impossible to make up the lost headway.

One further observation. It may seem surprising that I did not draw up a comprehensive programme from the very first days of trench warfare, instead of sending in piecemeal demands. The explanation is that each day's operations revealed fresh needs, which created increased demands. Furthermore, I knew that the War Minister was having difficulty in getting orders executed, so that I proceeded step by step, drawing up requirements in order of urgency and only sending them forward when the preceding ones had been fulfilled.

*Note by Translator*

In his Memoirs, Marshal Joffre now devotes some 55 pages (of which a summary is given in Appendix to Part III, page 596) to the munitions problem and the measures taken, in large part at his instigation, for securing an adequate supply of arms and ammunition of all sorts. It is sufficient to say here that the account he gives of the munitions problem in 1915 "presents a most eloquent picture and one which is full of instruction."

When the war opened, the matériel at the disposal of the French Army was suitable for a short and severe campaign of open warfare. The Marshal, as far back as 1911, had made it quite clear to M. Messimy, the War Minister, that the immense expenditure of ammunition entailed by the use of modern weapons, would necessitate heavy calls on private manufacture. At the time, political considerations prevented effect from being given to the Marshal's proposals. He relates, however, that thanks to M. Millerand, the War Minister in 1915, the problem was attacked with firmness and energy, and that all opposition was finally subdued and obstacles overcome.

By the end of 1915, much progress had been made, for instance:

Field artillery had been more than doubled.

Heavy artillery of all calibres had been immensely developed.

All guns, from the 37 mm. to the 370 mm., had been supplied with ammunition.

Trench artillery had been created in sufficient quantity.

Grenades and gas-shell had practically been perfected and large quantities supplied to the troops.

In addition to this, large supplies had been furnished to the Allies, notably Russia, Belgium and Servia.

The truth is that a stupendous and continued effort was made in regard to manufacture of munitions, and this should be placed on record. To quote the Marshal:

The facts have been hidden from the country. The errors we made have been exposed, but the difficulties we had to surmount, and the results we achieved, have been suppressed.

I have no wish to belittle the good work carried out by manufacturers, nor the services rendered by our Navy, nor the activities of M. Albert Thomas as Under Secretary of State (Artillery); but I feel it my duty to place on record the gratitude that the country owes, for his great achievements, to M. Millerand.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix, page 596.



## CHAPTER III

### *THE OPERATIONS IN 1915 IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM*

ON NOVEMBER 20, 1914,<sup>1</sup> I telegraphed to General Foch to know if the Eighth Army was ready to renew its offensive, in these terms:

"The enemy's passive attitude and the inactivity of his artillery . . . would appear to indicate that he is short of ammunition, or else that he is reorganizing his forces as a result of his heavy losses in the recent battles. . . .

"If the reorganization of the Eighth Army is sufficiently advanced, do you not think it would be advisable to launch an offensive south-east of Ypres as soon as possible? It appears to me that a twofold attack on Messines and Gheluvelt-Becelaire would not only put a stop at once to the enemy's progress south of Ypres, but would also serve as preparations for future operations."

General Foch replied at once<sup>2</sup> that he had already issued orders for reconnaissances to be made in order to find out for certain if the enemy was maintaining troops on the whole front but that, in his opinion, the time had not yet arrived for an offensive. His reasons for this were that the internal reliefs of the Eighth Army were not yet completed, and that units which had lately received reinforcements, including a number of recruits, had not yet finished reorganizing. He went on to say, however, that preparations for the offensive would be made "without delay and either with or without the British."

Further confirmation was received of movements of enemy forces towards Russia, entailing an appreciable thinning of their front, especially in Belgium. Consequently, I issued a Note to all armies on November 30th,<sup>3</sup> detailing the measures to be taken with a view to future operations:

<sup>1</sup> Telegram No. 4539 of November 20, 1914.

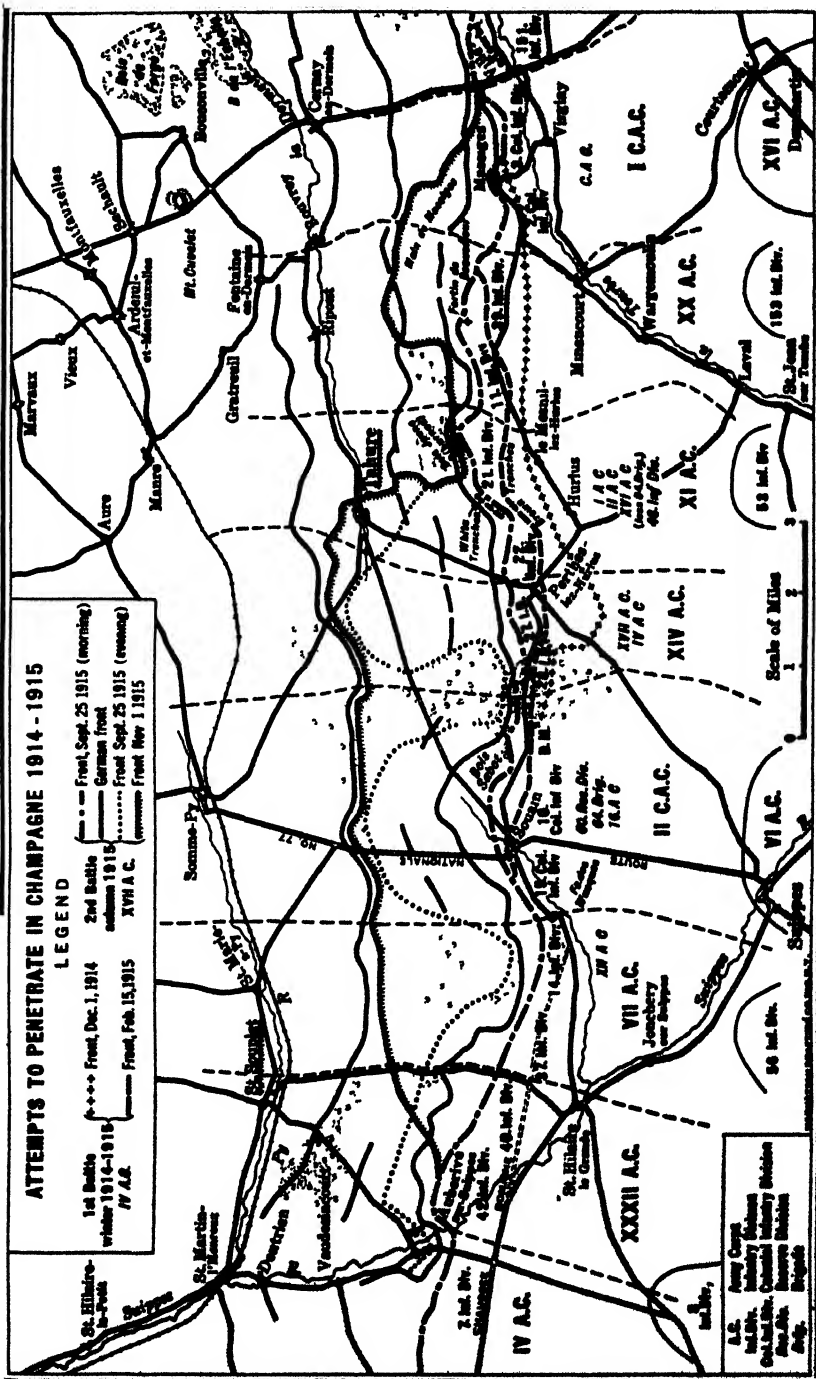
<sup>2</sup> Telegram No. 6691 of November 20, 1914, from General Foch.

<sup>3</sup> Note No. 7135 of November 30, 1914.

# ATTEMPTS TO PENETRATE IN CHAMPAGNE 1914 - 1915

## LEGEND

- 1st Battle of the Marne: Front, Dec. 1, 1914
- 2nd Battle of the Marne: Front, Feb. 15, 1915
- 3rd Battle of the Marne: Front, Sept. 25, 1915 (morning)
- 4th Battle of the Marne: Front, Sept. 25, 1915 (evening)
- 5th Battle of the Marne: Front, Nov. 1, 1915



A.C. Army Corps  
 Inf. Div. Infantry Division  
 Cav. Div. Cavalry Division  
 Art. Div. Artillery Division  
 Eng. Div. Engineer Division



. . . Preparations must, therefore, be made to take the offensive at a comparatively early date, as soon as orders for it are issued. . . .

On those parts of the front where an offensive appears possible, our line must be advanced to within 150 yds. of the enemy's position. Additional defences must be constructed so as to make the rest of the front invulnerable. . . .

A few days later,<sup>4</sup> I informed General Foch that I wished him to undertake some local operations in the Ypres region as soon as possible.

Although the reinforcement and re-organization of units were not yet completed and supplies of war material not yet made up, I decided, on December 8th, to take the offensive. This decision was embodied in a general Instruction,<sup>5</sup> supplemented by Special Instructions for each army.

The general idea comprised two main attacks to be carried out by the Tenth and Fourth Armies in the direction of Cambrai and Attigny respectively, and four secondary attacks to be undertaken by:

the Eighth Army in conjunction with the British left in the Vervick region—

the Second Army in the Combles area—

the Third Army between the Argonne and the Meuse—

the First Army in the direction of Thiaucourt.

In addition, the Army Detachment of the Vosges was to continue its operations in Upper Alsace.

In all cases, the results obtained were very poor. The Tenth Army launched its attack on December 17th, and the X Corps captured the village of Saint-Laurent (north of Arras), while the XXI Corps occupied the whole of the first German line on its front of attack. The German second line remained unbroken everywhere. The enemy's resistance, combined with the bad weather, gradually brought our efforts to a close in this direction.

The main attack of the Fourth Army, commanded by General de Langle, was carried out by the XII and XVII Corps between Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand and Perthes-les-Hurlus, in the direction of Somme-Py. The enemy's first line gave way on a front of about two miles and, though their counter-attacks prevented any extension of this success, the Germans failed to regain the lost ground. On December 25th, the Army Commander changed the direction of his attack to the line Perthes-les-Hurlus-Massiges. No success was obtained here and, furthermore, a very violent attack in the Argonne gained ground from the II Corps, which formed General de Langle's right. In the course of a brilliant operation

<sup>4</sup> Telegram No. 1530 of December 7, 1914.

<sup>5</sup> General Instruction No. 8 and Special Instructions Nos. 1725, 1751, 1752 and 1753.

carried out on January 8th by the XVII Corps, the village of Perthes-les-Hurlus was captured.

The secondary attacks gave even more scanty results. The Eighth Army attacked on December 14th and took Saint-Georges and the western edge of Lombaertzyde.

The Second Army launched its attack on the 17th and captured the Boisselle cemetery, the south-eastern corner of Mametz and several trenches north of Méricourt. On the following day, counter-attacks deprived us of a portion of these gains.

The operations of the First and Third Armies were a complete failure.

Several local operations had been projected on the front of the Sixth and Fifth Armies. General Maunoury, commanding the Sixth Army, had drawn up two plans of attack, to be carried out by the two wings of his army. The object of these was to establish himself more firmly on the high ground north of the Aisne, so as to facilitate the launching of an offensive later on. These attacks were to be made by the 6th group of Reserve Divisions on the Loges plateau,<sup>6</sup> and by the 5th group on hill 132 and the adjacent high ground (north of Soissons).

The attack on the Loges plateau was launched on December 21st and failed completely. The attack on hill 132 was preceded, on December 25th, by an artillery preparation but, as the defences did not appear to have been sufficiently destroyed, the assault was countermanded. On January 8th, a successful attack was made by five battalions, resulting in the capture of a portion of the enemy's first line. On the 9th and 10th, preparations were begun for further operations.

However, on the morning of the 12th, the enemy made a violent counter-attack, in the course of which we lost all our gains in the direction of hill 132. On the following day, the Germans succeeded in seizing all the high ground on the right bank of the Aisne, although our local reserves were brought up. To add to our misfortunes, the flooding of the river had left only two bridges standing, while the troops north of the river were exhausted after six days' hard fighting. General Maunoury considered, therefore, that their situation might become precarious and ordered the 5th Group of Reserve Divisions to recross south of the river, leaving only a bridge-head on the right bank. This movement was carried out in good order during the night of January 13th/14th.

The Fifth Army had prepared three attacks: by the XVIII Corps on the Moulin de Vauclers plateau, by the III Corps on hill 108 and the

<sup>6</sup> Quennevières.

high ground north of Craonne, and by troops from the Rheims sector on la Bertonnerie.

The first two of these attacks were forestalled by a German offensive on December 22nd/23rd, which, however, was repulsed. The Moroccan Division, in the Rheims sector, captured portions of several trenches.

To sum up, these various attacks had, for the most part, achieved trifling results, or none at all. The violent reactions which they induced in the Argonne and on the Aisne proved that the enemy was on the alert and ready to hit back vigorously. It was evident that we should have to make stupendous efforts if we were to succeed in uprooting the Germans from our soil.

Bad weather set in on January 10th and interrupted our operations. I issued orders<sup>7</sup> for the number of men in the front line to be reduced to a minimum, and for the remainder to be withdrawn for rest and re-organization. Staffs were to carry our reconnaissances and liaisons and verify lines of defence, while the artillery was to improve observation posts and liaison and at the same time continue to keep the enemy's works under fire.

I was induced by the length of the front, the number of units in the line and the diversity of matters to be settled, to organize the armies of the East similarly to those in the North, whose operations were co-ordinated by General Foch. Consequently, on January 5, 1915,<sup>8</sup> I delegated the conduct of the operations of the First and Third Armies to General Dubail, commanding the First Army. The front of these armies extended from the Swiss frontier up to, and including, the Argonne.

It was at this juncture that the Intelligence Service reported a double movement of troops by rail in the interior of Germany, towards both Eastern and Western fronts. The theory that the Germans were withdrawing troops from our front, in order to increase their numbers opposed to the Russians, therefore, fell to the ground. Thanks to their powerful peace-time organization and numerous *cadres*, the Germans were able to draw on their depots to form fresh army corps, and this was likely to make it still more difficult for us to renew our operations.

I had no doubt that this was the case, but none the less it did not weaken my determination to keep the initiative. This meant, however, that reserves had to be constituted as rapidly as possible.

With this object in view, I wrote to the Minister on January 15, 1915, requesting him to urge the British Cabinet to despatch reinforcements

<sup>7</sup> Note No. 2796 of January 10, 1915.

<sup>8</sup> Letter No. 4230 of January 15, 1915.

to France so as to "relieve us as soon as possible in that part of our line which extended to the sea."

At the same time, I asked that "march battalions" might be formed from our depot troops and sent up in rear of the armies. These battalions would constitute a reserve which could be used without delay for replacing fighting units.

On January 21st, I decided to renew the Fourth Army's offensive and also to form large reserves, either for exploiting that Army's successes, for resuming or starting other operations, or for meeting a German attack. Consequently, on that day, I issued a series of Instructions for the following operations:

(a) The Fourth Army, supported by the Third, to continue its offensive in Champagne.

(b) The First Army to pursue its attacks on the right bank of the Meuse and against both flanks of von Strantz's detachment, which was holding the Saint-Mihiel salient.

(c) The Army Detachment of the Vosges to continue the operations then in progress.

(d) The other armies to strengthen their positions and to form local reserves.

The plan of operations<sup>9</sup> drawn up by General de Langle again comprised a main attack and secondary actions. The I and XVII Corps were to carry out the main attack on a front of 5 miles, between fort Beauséjour and the woods west of Perthes-les-Hurlus. On the immediate left, a secondary or holding attack was to be made by the 60th Division on the Sabot wood. Attacks were to be threatened by the XII Corps on the left wing and the Colonial Corps on the right.

On February 3rd, preparations for these operations were interrupted by a series of local attacks carried out by the enemy west of Perthes, north of Mesine-les-Hurlus and north of Massiges. The first two were easily repulsed. The third one, which was the most important, was preceded by the explosion of several mines and was made by three regiments, which succeeded in capturing the front-line trenches of the Colonial Corps. Our 36th Division attempted to carry out a preparatory operation at about the same time, but met with no success.

It was evident that the enemy was very much on the alert, and also that we ourselves had been at fault and negligent in some respects. I at once drew attention to the need of improving the morale of the troops, and I set my face against the slowing-down of the daily rate of artillery

<sup>9</sup> See Map.

fire, which General de Langle reported was due to the bad weather and state of the roads. It was raining on the enemy's side of the line just as much as on ours.

All available army reserves of the Armies were moved into the Fourth Army zone before the start of the offensive. They consisted of:

The 7th Division of the IV Corps—(from the Fifth Army).

The II Corps, lately withdrawn from the Argonne—(Third Army).

The I Cavalry Corps—(from the Secondary Army).

The start of the operations had been fixed by the General commanding the Fourth Army for February 12th. On that morning, however, there was a heavy snow-storm and the operations were postponed, but the return of fine weather enabled the general attack to be fixed for the 16th.

On the evening before, I telegraphed<sup>10</sup> as follows to General de Langle:

"I count on you and have confidence in the Fourth Army. In order that you may be able to exploit your success, you will be supported in good time by all the forces at my disposal."

The attack of the I and XVII Corps resulted in considerable gains. Part of Fort Beauséjour and over 500 yards of trenches to the north-east, the *Tranchées Blanches*, were captured on a front of 850 yards, and also about a mile of trenches between Perthes and the woods to the west. These gains were maintained during the following days in the face of furious counter-attacks on the part of the enemy, who had hastily brought up some twenty battalions from various parts of his line.

I authorized General de Langle to move the II Corps forward and, later on, to put a division of this Corps into the battle. On the 20th,<sup>11</sup> I urged him to push forward the operations of the Colonial and XII Corps. Furthermore, I placed the following troops, successively, at his disposal:

The artillery and cyclist groups of the I Cavalry Corps.<sup>12</sup>

The 8th Division of the IV Corps.<sup>13</sup>

The 4th Division of the II Corps.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, I advanced the XVI Corps to the neighbourhood of Eprenay Châlons, whence they were in a position to be brought up quickly into the battle.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, seeing the necessity for rapid

<sup>10</sup> Telegram No. 4808 of February 15, 1915.

<sup>11</sup> Telegram No. 6711 of February 20, 1915.

<sup>12</sup> Telegram No. 6505 of February 20, 1915.

<sup>13</sup> Telegram No. 6964 of February 21, 1915.

<sup>14</sup> Telegram No. 7603 of February 23, 1915.

<sup>15</sup> Telegram No. 6943 of February 21, 1915.



to France so as to "relieve us as soon as possible in that part of our line which extended to the sea."

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On January 21st, I decided to renew the Fourth Army's offensive and also to form large reserves, either for exploiting that Army's successes, for resuming or starting other operations, or for meeting a German attack. Consequently, on that day, I issued a series of Instructions for the following operations:

(a) The Fourth Army, supported by the Third, to continue its offensive in Champagne.

(b) The First Army to pursue its attacks on the right bank of the Meuse and against both flanks of von Strantz's detachment, which was holding the Saint-Mihiel salient.

(c) The Army Detachment of the Vosges to continue the operations then in progress.

(d) The other armies to strengthen their positions and to form local reserves.

The plan of operations<sup>9</sup> drawn up by General de Langle again comprised a main attack and secondary actions. The I and XVII Corps were to carry out the main attack on a front of 5 miles, between fort Beauséjour and the woods west of Perthes-les-Hurlus. On the immediate left, a secondary or holding attack was to be made by the 60th Division on the Sabot wood. Attacks were to be threatened by the XII Corps on the left wing and the Colonial Corps on the right.

On February 3rd, preparations for these operations were interrupted by a series of local attacks carried out by the enemy west of Perthes, north of Mesine-les-Hurlus and north of Massiges. The first two were easily repulsed. The third one, which was the most important, was preceded by the explosion of several mines and was made by three regiments, which succeeded in capturing the front-line trenches of the Colonial Corps. Our 36th Division attempted to carry out a preparatory operation at about the same time, but met with no success.

It was evident that the enemy was very much on the alert, and also that we ourselves had been at fault and negligent in some respects. I at once drew attention to the need of improving the morale of the troops, and I set my face against the slowing-down of the daily rate of artillery

<sup>9</sup> See Map.

fire, which General de Langle reported was due to the bad weather and state of the roads. It was raining on the enemy's side of the line just as much as on ours.

All available army reserves of the Armies were moved into the Fourth Army zone before the start of the offensive. They consisted of:

The 7th Division of the IV Corps—(from the Fifth Army).

The II Corps, lately withdrawn from the Argonne—(Third Army).

The I Cavalry Corps—(from the Secondary Army).

The start of the operations had been fixed by the General commanding the Fourth Army for February 12th. On that morning, however, there was a heavy snow-storm and the operations were postponed, but the return of fine weather enabled the general attack to be fixed for the 16th.

On the evening before, I telegraphed<sup>10</sup> as follows to General de Langle:

"I count on you and have confidence in the Fourth Army. In order that you may be able to exploit your success, you will be supported in good time by all the forces at my disposal."

The attack of the I and XVII Corps resulted in considerable gains. Part of Fort Beauséjour and over 500 yards of trenches to the north-east, the *Tranchées Blanches*, were captured on a front of 850 yards, and also about a mile of trenches between Perthes and the woods to the west. These gains were maintained during the following days in the face of furious counter-attacks on the part of the enemy, who had hastily brought up some twenty battalions from various parts of his line.

I authorized General de Langle to move the II Corps forward and, later on, to put a division of this Corps into the battle. On the 20th,<sup>11</sup> I urged him to push forward the operations of the Colonial and XII Corps. Furthermore, I placed the following troops, successively, at his disposal:

The artillery and cyclist groups of the I Cavalry Corps.<sup>12</sup>

The 8th Division of the IV Corps.<sup>13</sup>

The 4th Division of the II Corps.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, I advanced the XVI Corps to the neighbourhood of Eprenay Châlons, whence they were in a position to be brought up quickly into the battle.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, seeing the necessity for rapid

<sup>10</sup> Telegram No. 4808 of February 15, 1915.

<sup>11</sup> Telegram No. 6711 of February 20, 1915.

<sup>12</sup> Telegram No. 6505 of February 20, 1915.

<sup>13</sup> Telegram No. 6664 of February 21, 1915.

<sup>14</sup> Telegram No. 7603 of February 23, 1915.

<sup>15</sup> Telegram No. 6943 of February 21, 1915.

and vigorous action, I wrote to<sup>16</sup> General de Langle: "... in view of the results already achieved, there can be no doubt that we can count on a success which will have far-reaching effects, especially on neutrals, some of whom are only awaiting a favourable sign to decide on their line of action."

The battle slowed down for a period but, on the 23rd, was renewed with great violence. On the 27th and 28th, our progress was maintained on the front of the XVII Corps (between Mesnil and the Sabot wood) and of the I Corps (between Mesnil and Beauséjour). The key of the enemy's second line was hill 196, and this was captured after a fierce struggle by the 51st Infantry Regiment (3rd Division—II Corps).

This meant that the enemy's defences had been pierced, but only on a narrow front. Heavy counter-attacks, carried out by the Prussian Guard, were beaten back.

On March 7th, General de Langle attempted to widen the breach by extending his front of attack to the west. A brigade of the XVI Corps and parts of the 60th Division forced their way into the Sabot wood and established themselves there, but were unable to advance beyond the first captured line.

Although this attempt had only partially succeeded, General de Langle contemplated a decisive attack and asked my permission to engage the XVI Corps, reinforced by the 48th Division, between hills 196 and 198. There were only hastily constructed defences on our front here, so that a rapid advance was to be anticipated, especially as we had massed a quantity of heavy guns in this sector.

I gave my consent to this on the following day. At the same time, however, I notified the Army Commander that he would have to re-organize his forces and hand me back four out of the five Corps engaged, if only a local success was gained by the XVI Corps (commanded by General Grossetti, a splendid soldier), after its attack had been pressed home.<sup>17</sup>

On March 12th, the battle entered on its last stage. About 10.30 a.m., the 31st and 48th Divisions launched an attack on the front between hill 199 and the Mesnil Tahure road. The attack was renewed at 6 p.m., but achieved little success that day. On the following day, an appreciable advance was made north-west and north of hill 196, and in the Bois Brûlé. On the 14th, further progress was made, and a violent counter-attack was successfully repulsed on the 15th. Still further progress was

<sup>16</sup> Letter No. 7420 of February 22, 1915.

<sup>17</sup> Note No. 2759 of March 8, 1915.

marked on the 16th north of hill 196 and the whole of the Bois Jaune Brûlé was captured.

On the 17th, these successes were reported to me by General de Langle who, however, notified me that, in conformity with the instructions contained in my note of March 8th, he proposed to suspend the offensive.

On the following day, I expressed my thanks to the Fourth Army and its General, and complimented them on their performance.

The troops had fought very well in spite of the continual bad weather and I was especially gratified to see that, by dint of unremitting efforts, we had succeeded in forcing our way right through the enemy's position. The success was in itself small and incomplete, but it seemed to me to mark the first stage on the road to victory. This victory we would certainly achieve when our matériel had been sufficiently developed, and when we had perfected our methods of warfare.

The behaviour of the 51st Regiment, which was the first to penetrate right through the enemy's defences, was especially deserving of notice. I made a point of reviewing it several days after it had been withdrawn from the battle, and thanked its commander, Colonel Brion, "in the name of France."

As regards General de Langle, he confirmed my previous good opinion of him. Methodical and self-controlled, and kind to his subordinates, he was loyal and correct in his relations with myself. He had carried out this first big experiment very well, and its lessons were to be of great service in future battles.

March 18th marks the end of the operations in Champagne during the winter of 1914-15.

It was on this same day that the Franco-British fleet, assembled under the orders of Vice-Admiral de Robeck in the eastern Mediterranean, attempted in vain to force the passage of the Dardanelles. I will revert later on to this operation; I simply mention it here on account of the coincidence in the date.

As I have already said, operations by the Third and First Armies were comprised in the General Instructions issued to Armies on January 21, 1915.

The First Army was to make preparations for an attack in the Woëvre, while the Third was to renew offensive actions, in a northerly direction, on various parts of its front, in conjunction with the Fourth Army's attack, with which I have just dealt.

A sector of the Third Army's front which was a particularly sensitive

one was the Argonne. The German forces here consisted of the XVI German Corps, commanded by a former Pioneer Officer,<sup>18</sup> who had at his disposal a large number of specialists and a powerful siege matériel. This corps, ever since the end of September, had waged a bitter struggle against our II Corps and left of the V Corps, a struggle in which the advantage practically never rested with us. It is true that the country was a difficult one, being wooded and hilly, but it was the same for the enemy.

The Germans were provided with *Minenwerfer*, fire-throwers and grenades, while we had to be satisfied with improvised weapons of this sort. However, the main factor was that the Germans had seized the initiative and that our local commanders had been incapable of setting up a proper organization. All that was done was to maintain a passive defence, to lose ground at every stroke of the enemy, and to waste numbers in vain and costly counter-attacks.

On January 6, 1915,<sup>19</sup> I had written to General de Langle pointing out that the succession of unfortunate incidents in the Argonne made it clear that the defences were not strong enough, which was inexcusable after three months occupation. I requested him to remind General Gérard, commanding the II Corps, of the instructions regarding the organization of a defensive position.

We were exhausting ourselves in unco-ordinated efforts in this sector so, with a view to establishing some sort of cohesion, I had decided on November 20, 1914, to place the 10th Division (on the left of the V Corps) under the orders of General Gérard, thus bringing all the troops in the Argonne under his command. I was several times obliged to withdraw troops from quieter sectors and send them up to the Argonne as reinforcements. In December, the foreign regiment, commanded by Beppino Garibaldi, was sent there, and the devotion of this regiment constituted the first chapter of Italy's co-operation in the Great War.<sup>20</sup>

These measures proved unavailing, reverse followed reverse, and the exhaustion of the II and X Corps<sup>21</sup> induced me to order the following moves:

The First Army to extend its left to Bethincourt and so to take over the defence of Verdun—

<sup>18</sup> General von Mudra.

<sup>19</sup> Letter No. 1523 of January 6, 1915.

<sup>20</sup> Two of Colonel Garibaldi's brothers were killed there.

<sup>21</sup> General Gouraud, commanding the 10th Division, was wounded on January 8th during a German counter-attack, which drove us back towards the Chalade.

The Third Army to take over the whole of the Argonne sector, up to the Aisne.<sup>22</sup>

I relieved the II Corps and 10th Division, and placed the XXXII Corps (40th and 42nd Divisions) at General Sarrail's disposal.

The objects of these changes were threefold. First, as I have said, to free General de Langle from all preoccupation in regard to the Argonne, at a time when he would need to concentrate entirely on the preparations for the Champagne battle. Secondly, to place the Argonne sector under the Third Army Commander. Thirdly, to allot Verdun and the two arms of the Saint-Mihiel salient to the General commanding the First Army.

In regard to Verdun, on December 23rd I had drawn General Dubail's attention to the situation created by the simultaneous advance of the Germans on the heights of the Meuse and in the Argonne. This advance showed how important were the operations of the First Army in the Woëvre, and of the Third Army in the Vauquois district.

The situation in the Argonne was in no wise improved by General Sarrail's assumption of command, nor by the arrival of the XXXII Corps, which was one of the best in the French Army. The enemy launched attacks on January 8th and 29th, and on February 10th and 16th and, in each case, we were forced back. On February 17th, the Third Army attempted to capture the Vauquois observation post, but failed completely.

The First Army carried out several small local attacks on the Bois Brûlé, Bois-le-Prêtre, and Eparges. The object of these was to divert the enemy's attention from the Champagne front. They also served as preparations for the more comprehensive operations in the Woëvre, which were referred to in my Instructions dated January 21st.

The Fourth Army's attacks in Champagne were brought to an end on March 18th. On this date, I informed General Dubail that I had decided that he was to undertake the operation for the reduction of the Saint-Mihiel salient, as soon as possible. He was to employ in this attack all the means at his disposal.

General Dubail drew up a plan of operations comprising two simultaneous attacks on either arm of the salient, one in the direction of Verdun-la-Chaussée and the other centred on Toul-Thiaucourt. I placed the following troops at his disposal:

I, II and XII Corps } —as from April 1st.  
I Cavalry Corps }  
XVII Corps —as from April 8th.

<sup>22</sup> The Headquarters of the Third Army moved from Verdun to Sainte-Menehould.

The heavy artillery of the First Army was made up to 360 guns ranging from 95 mm. to 220 mm. The Field artillery amounted to more than 900—75 mm. guns and 100—90 mm. guns, in addition to a quantity of trench artillery. This trench artillery, it is true, had only lately been delivered from the factories and was not at all familiar to the detachments, and its effect was indifferent.

To achieve success in position warfare of this description, "surprise" is *essential*, but it is the most *difficult* element to bring about. Entrrenched behind strong barbed-wire entanglements, troops can hold out long enough for local reserves to be rushed to the threatened point. It is *essential* to allow the hostile commander no time to bring up his general reserves, and this is the object of "surprise." It is *difficult* to effect surprise because preparations for an attack are spread over a considerable period and can be detected by the enemy. Troops and matériel have to be moved forward and arrangements made for every service, all of which are betrayed by increased road and rail movements. A further difficulty is presented by the artillery preparation, whose duration we could not sufficiently shorten in 1915, owing to lack of matériel. Finally, all sorts of indiscretions are bound to happen, in the front and behind the lines. Orders are issued for absolute secrecy but, in spite of this, it is disconcerting how rapidly news is spread. The recent battle in Champagne was a very good example of this.

I wished General Dubail's attack to be in the nature of a surprise, and to take the form of a sudden offensive, especially on the front of the corps which were to debouch from the Hauts de Meuse, east of Verdun. All practicable measures were taken to ensure as rapid a concentration as means of transport would allow, and in the utmost secrecy.

The preliminary operations started on March 20th in the region west of Bois-le-Prêtre. The object of these was to use up the enemy's reserves and to advance our line within assaulting distance of the German positions on the front Remenauville-Regnieville—north of Fey-en-Haye. They were carried out by the troops occupying the sector (73rd Division and a brigade of the VIII Corps), to avoid disclosing to the enemy those detailed for the decisive attack.

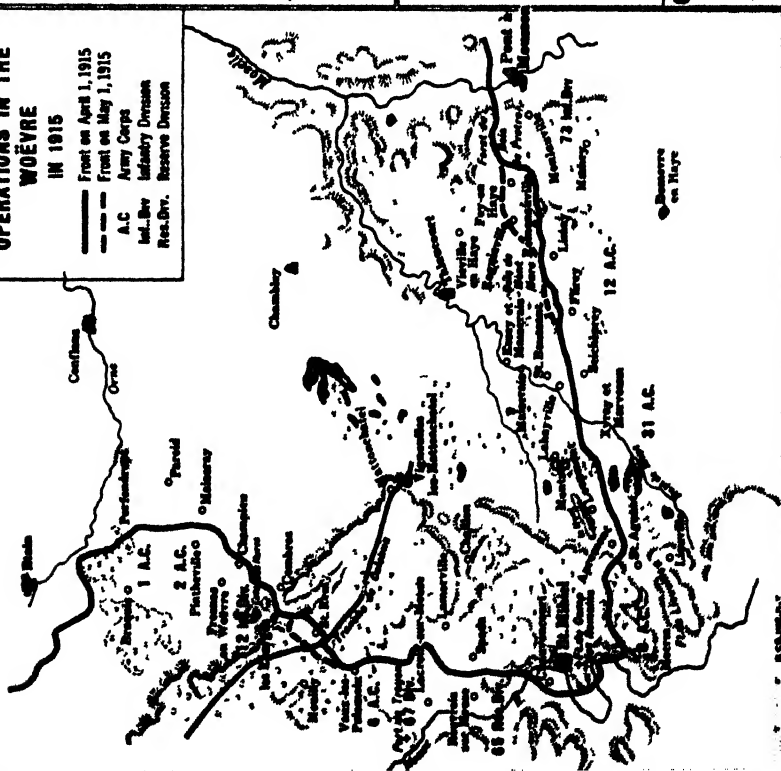
On March 30th, the brigade of the VIII Corps made an advance of some 850 yards on a front of over half a mile, and so was able to surround Fey-en-Haye. The XXXI Corps established itself at several points only 100 yards from the edge of the Bois de Mort-Mare.

During the night of March 31st/April 1st, this Corps took possession of Fey-en-Haye without encountering any resistance and established it

# OPERATIONS IN THE WOËVRE

IN 1915

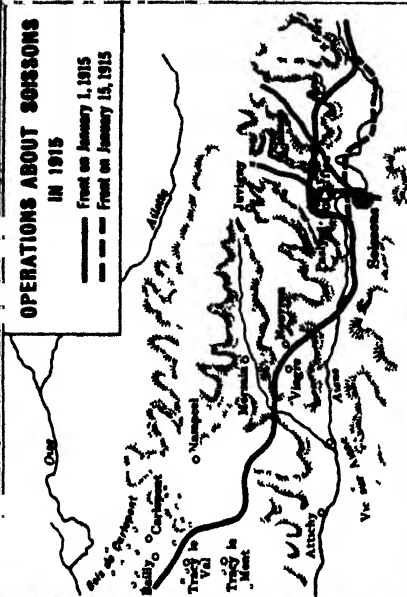
— Front on April 1, 1915  
- - - Front on May 1, 1915  
A.C. Army Corps  
Inf. Div. Infantry Division  
Res. Div. Reserve Division



# OPERATIONS ABOUT SOISSONS

IN 1915

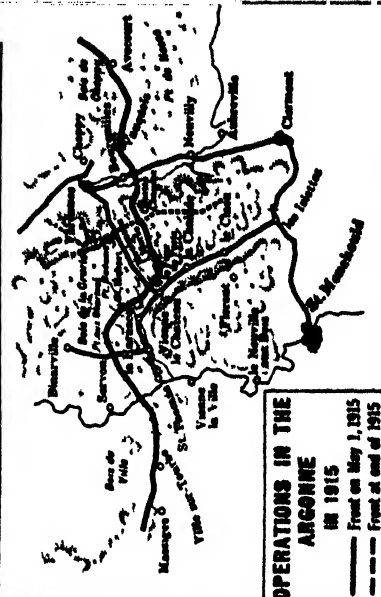
— Front on January 1, 1915  
- - - Front on January 15, 1915



# OPERATIONS IN THE ARGONNE

IN 1915

— Front on May 1, 1915  
- - - Front at end of 1915







self north of the village. Fierce fighting took place in the Quart-en-Réserve (west of the Bois-le-Prêtre) where the 73rd Division succeeded in capturing over 500 yards of enemy trenches.

The XII Corps had been detailed for the attack on the southern arm of the Saint-Mihiel salient, and took up its position on the night of April 1st/2nd in its allotted sector, between the Ache ravine and the Bois-le-Prêtre. On the 3rd this Corps captured Regnieville, surrounded Remenauville and so prepared its "jumping off" place.

The I and II Corps, which were to operate east of Verdun and against the northern arm of the Saint-Mihiel salient, were in the meanwhile moving up towards the line with the object of establishing themselves within assaulting distance, where they would remain until the artillery bombardment, which started on the 5th, had sufficiently prepared the way.

Unfortunately, the weather turned to rain. At first sight, this seemed to me to our advantage as the approach and placing in position of the attacking troops would be hidden from hostile aircraft. The continuation of the rain was, however, disastrous. The Woëvre, always marshy in winter, became a quagmire, and the trenches were flooded. The artillery found it difficult to take up position in the sodden fields, observation of fire was almost impossible, while the shells buried themselves in the spongy ground.

A feeling of uneasiness spread to both the troops and the staffs. It would have been advisable, perhaps, to have postponed the attack, but men could not be kept for long in the flooded trenches, and a delay would have deprived the attack of its valuable element of surprise. General Dubail, therefore, gave the order for the attack to be launched.

The results obtained were negligible. The I and II Corps, temporarily formed into a detachment under the command of General Gérard, hurled themselves against unbroken defences on the front between Parfondrupt and Maizeray. The XII Corps experienced a similar failure. The attacks were continued on April 6th and 7th in the face of the same difficulties, and were everywhere unsuccessful.

In the hopes of effecting a surprise, the attack had been launched suddenly but, on the evening of the 7th, General Dubail declared that he considered that it was no longer possible to continue it under the same conditions. The enemy's defences were shown to be very strong and, for the reasons I have just given, hardly damaged by our artillery preparation. Consequently, on the following day, I ordered General Dubail "to change to a methodical but powerful attack in order to gain ground

wherever possible, and to retain the enemy's attention and reserves in this region."<sup>23</sup>

The operations of the First Army were continued on these lines, but the enemy was everywhere on the alert. He had brought up large reinforcements and, on April 24th, he launched these in a violent attack on the Calonne trench in the direction of Fort Rozelier. In order to restore the situation, I was forced to place the 48th Division at the disposal of General Roques, commanding the First Army.

Any further hopes I had in this battle of the Woëvre were very slight, and I was obliged to turn my attention to the forthcoming operations in the north. I decided, as from April 14th, to leave only the II and XII Corps with General Dubail and to withdraw the I Corps, which had not been heavily engaged, as well as Conneau's Cavalry Corps and the XVII Corps which had not been engaged at all.

The main lessons to be drawn from this battle were that success is only possible "where attacks are thoroughly and methodically organized; where the infantry has been previously established within assaulting distance, but is only launched to the attack after auxiliary defences have been completely destroyed and after the first and second lines of the enemy's trenches have been demolished, where liaison of every description is properly assured. . . . The establishment of these conditions is a matter for the Commanding General. . . ." <sup>24</sup>

It will be remembered that the attack organized by the Tenth Army in December 1914 in the Arras region had been checked at the outset by the bad weather and deplorable state of the ground. My special Instructions issued to General Foch on January 21, 1915, laid down that this army was "to push preparations forward as far as possible for combined attacks, which would be renewed . . . as soon as circumstances allowed."<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, my main preoccupation was the Champagne front. At the beginning of March, 1915, General Foch proposed an offensive in Artois, but this seemed to me to be premature. As a matter of fact, in regard to this region I was contemplating urging the French Government to represent that reinforcements should be sent to the British Army, and so enable Field Marshal Sir John French to relieve the greater part of the French Eighth Army. This would effect an equitable distribu-

<sup>23</sup> Telegram No. 2724 of April 8, 1915.

<sup>24</sup> Note No. 3520 of April 10, 1915.

<sup>25</sup> Special Instructions No. 38 of January 21, 1915.

tion of the Allied Armies on the Western front, and would free troops for my offensive operations. My correspondence with M. Millerand was largely taken up, during the last weeks of 1914, by this matter.

It was not until December 27, 1914, after a meeting between the British Commander-in-Chief and myself, that it was decided to relieve the XVI Corps (right of the Eighth Army) by two British divisions (the 27th and 28th) which were then detraining. The relief was commenced on January 6, 1915, but was not completed until the beginning of February.

I had another meeting with the Field Marshal at this period, in the course of which he undertook to carry out the relief of the last two corps of the Ninth Army (the XX and IX Corps) as soon as possible. However, the promised reinforcements (Canadian Division and 29th British Division) did not arrive on the expected dates, while the Territorial divisions promised in their place were replaced by 24 Territorial battalions of inferior quality.

These delays were all the more exasperating in that the time was approaching for the offensive contemplated in my orders of January 21st.

It seemed that the British Government wished to reserve troops for another theatre. The Dardanelles affair, which I will touch on later, was primarily planned as a purely naval action, but it soon assumed the form of a combined naval and military operation.<sup>26</sup>

This unsettled state of affairs was a source of great worry to Sir John French who, moreover, was obliged to suspend the relief of the Eighth Army during the last fortnight in February, on account of the indifferent quality of the reinforcements sent from England. He was making preparations at this time for an attack at the beginning of March on La Bassée, for which he was keeping his best troops.

This action was begun on March 10th, and gave good results at the end of the first day's fighting. Neuve Chapelle and the whole of the first German line to a depth of about 2 miles were captured by our Allies. This success was not, however, followed up and the Field Marshal stopped the operations on March 17th and consolidated the captured positions.

Fresh reinforcements<sup>27</sup> eventually arrived, which enabled the British front to be extended and the whole of our Eighth Army to be relieved. I was able to constitute a fairly large reserve from portions of this Army,

<sup>26</sup> For example, the 29th Division was expected by Sir John French on the Western front, but was sent by Lord Kitchener to the Dardanelles, in March.

<sup>27</sup> Canadian North Midland, South Midland, and London, West Riding and Northumbrian Divisions.

which were withdrawn during April, and took advantage of this to rearrange the distribution of my armies.

As from April 4, 1915, the remainder of the Eighth Army was formed into the "Army Detachment in Belgium." General d'Urbal, who had been in command of the Eighth Army, now broken up, took over the Tenth, in the place of General de Maud'huy. The latter was given a new army, the Seventh, which included the former "Army Detachment of the Vosges." In this way, I was able to lighten the task of the First Army whose front, as I have mentioned above, had been extended north of Verdun.

At this period, the British forces in France consisted of 6 army corps (1 Indian) and 2 cavalry corps (1 Indian), which were grouped into two armies.

These forces held a front of some 30 miles, between La Bassée and Langemarck. They were in touch, on the right, with our Tenth Army and, on the left, with the Southern Group of the "Army Detachment in Belgium."

These new dispositions had scarcely been completed when, on April 22, 1915, the Germans launched a violent attack in the Ypres region, which was accompanied by dense clouds of asphyxiating gas. The attack was directed against the left of the British Second Army and the right of the Army Detachment in Belgium. Taken by surprise by the deadly effects of the gas, both the British troops and the French Territorials were forced to give way. On the morning of the 23rd, the Canadian Division and the British 28th Division checked the enemy's advance by means of vigorous counter-attacks. General Foch then organized a powerful attack which finally restored the situation on the 24th. The troops collected for this consisted of reinforcements drawn from the Nieupoort Group and Tenth Army, and also some Belgian infantry and artillery.

In this way, the consequences of the Germans' unexpected employment of this disloyal weapon were reduced to the proportions of an unpleasant incident of no serious outcome.

The result might have been quite different if our adversaries had carried out the attack on a big scale, and brought up large reserves to exploit the initial success, instead of operating on a narrow front with limited numbers. It is possible that they themselves did not foresee the success of the gas-clouds, and had not sufficient reserves at hand to rush into the gap. In any case, they had lost their opportunity, but to us the lesson was patent. At once, we hastily took in hand the production of gas for

our own use, and the organization of defensive measures against this new weapon.

In addition to the troops which had been set free by the reinforcement of the British Army, 5 newly-formed French divisions were placed at my disposal. These divisions were made up from troops at the depots and were of excellent material. However, they had not yet had any actual war experience, so I had the divisions broken up and their units grouped with others which had already seen fighting. In this way, I was able to create four divisions (151st to 154th) and a brigade of chasseurs consisting of 5 battalions (5th Brigade). Furthermore, some of the Army Corps, which had been earmarked for the forthcoming attacks, were made up to 3 divisions each.

At my request, General Foch submitted on March 24th the detailed plan of an important operation to be carried out in the Arras region. This plan comprised the following:

An attack by three Army Corps, with the Vimy ridge as objective (hills 119, 140, 132).

Two flank attacks. The first to the north of the main attack, having as objectives the Notre-Dame-de-Lorette ridge, the spur north of Souchez and then hill 119. The second to the south, in the direction of the high ground between hills 96 and 93 (about a mile south of Bailleul) and extending up to the Scarpe.

For this operation, General Foch requested me to reinforce the Tenth Army by 3 army corps, 72 heavy guns and a supply of material and ammunition for a ten days' battle based on the expenditure during the Champagne offensive.

The British First Army was to carry out an attack in the general direction Ligny-le-Grand—La Cluquetterie.

A note issued to Armies on April 19, 1915, laid down the methods to be employed in the preparation and execution of the attacks. It was pointed out in this Note that the object of an offensive action was not confined to seizing a line of hostile trenches, but included driving the enemy from the whole of his position, and defeating him before he had time to take up a fresh one. To achieve this result, most careful organization and detailed preparation were essential.

All commanders, those of the largest units, of infantry formations and of the batteries detailed for their support, were to make a careful study of maps and air photographs and carry out personal reconnaissances. It was the duty of these commanders to lay down everyone's task and

to leave as little as possible to chance. The Note went on to detail the measures to be taken to ensure not only a successful start to the attack but also adequate arrangements for supply and evacuation. Finally, the method of employing the artillery, both before and during the attack, was defined. Once launched, the attack was to be "violent and rapid," and was to be carried out *without check or pause*, until, by continually bringing up fresh units, the final result was obtained.

The action of the Tenth Army was based on these conceptions, to which General Foch advanced no objections.

The attack was fixed, in principle, for May 1st, but was postponed for several days in order to complete the preparation of matériel. General Foch notified Sir John French in good time of this decision and, in accordance with the latter's suggestion, May 7th was decided upon as the date of the attack.

However, shortly after this, the Field Marshal informed me that the enemy had been very active in the Ypres region ever since the attack on April 22nd. In consequence, he notified me that full co-operation on the part of the British Army could not be counted upon unless 3 active French divisions were posted in rear of his left, so as to ensure connection with the Belgian Army.

General Foch at once instructed the Commander of the Army Detachment in Belgium to ensure this liaison, and directed him to carry out a vigorous attack on his front, on May 7th, in conjunction with the Belgian Army.

At the same time, I communicated the date of the opening of the offensive to the King of the Belgians, and requested the co-operation of his Army.<sup>28</sup>

The weather turned very bad on May 6th and 7th, necessitating a further postponement of the attack.

On the evening of May 8th, all the available cavalry divisions were warned to be ready to move into the Tenth Army Zone. On the morning of the 9th, all the troops I was able to withdraw from the other armies were moved near the battle. These were the III Corps,<sup>29</sup> 53rd Division,<sup>30</sup> Conneau's Cavalry Corps<sup>31</sup> which had been made up by the Third Cavalry Division and which was concentrated in the neighbourhood of Amiens, and the 6th Cavalry Division which detrained at Hesdin.

I myself proceeded to Doullens where my Command Post was estab-

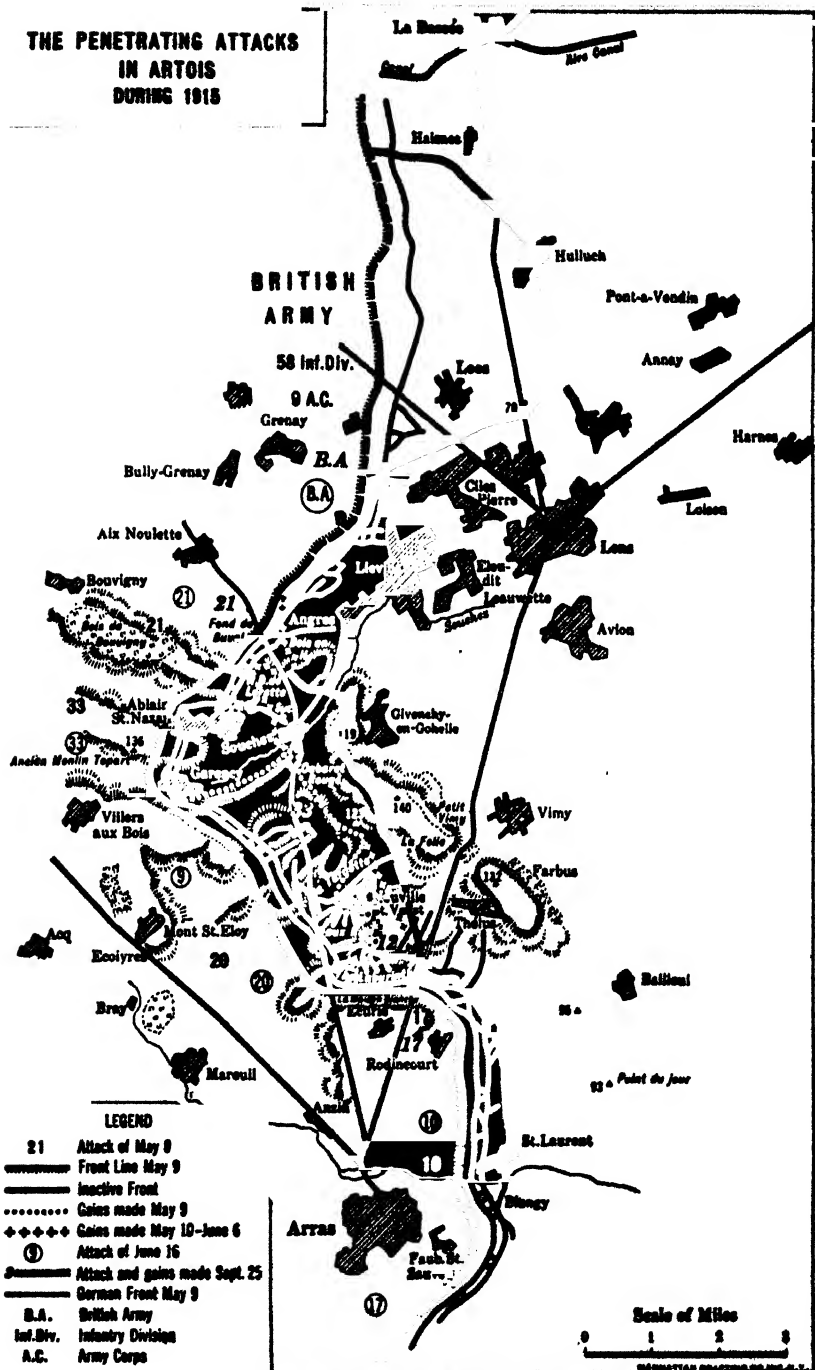
<sup>28</sup> Letter No. 2043 of May 5, 1915.

<sup>29</sup> From the Fifth Army.

<sup>30</sup> From the Sixth Army.

<sup>31</sup> From the Army Detachment in Lorraine.

# THE PENETRATING ATTACKS IN ARTOIS DURING 1915







lished, in proximity to the reserves which I could at once put into the battle.

The attack was launched at 10 a.m. on May 9th. The main action was carried out by the XXI, XXXIII, XX, XVII and X Corps on the front hill 140—La Folie—Thelus—Bailleul—Point du Jour. The attack was extended to the left in the direction of Loos—hill 70—Annay, by the IX Corps and the 58th Division. The British First Army attacked in conjunction with our IX Corps to the north-west of La Bassée, in the direction of Don.

Good progress was made on May 9th. The XXXIII Corps, in a single advance of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles in less than 2 hours, reached the ridge between Souchez and hill 140. In the meantime, the IX Corps was nearing the slopes west of Loos, while the XXI Corps was advancing north of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette and in the direction of Souchez. The XX Corps, on the right of the XXXIII, captured La Targette, and a portion of Neuville-Saint-Waast. More to the south, however, the results obtained by the X and XVII Corps were negligible. In all, we captured 3000 prisoners, 6 guns and a large number of machine guns.

The result as a whole was a striking success in the centre, particularly on the part of the XXXIII Corps, and it was important to exploit it.

The Moroccan Division reached hill 140 about 11 a.m., but it had used up all its reserves in this extraordinarily rapid advance. At 10.45 a.m., the Divisional Commander called on the reserves of the XXXIII Corps (the 8th *Zouaves* and 4th *Turcos*). However, these two regiments were at Mont Saint-Eloy and Acq, a distance of 5 miles from the objectives which had been reached. The 8th *Zouaves* were placed at the disposal of the Moroccan Division at 11.30 a.m., but only came up into the battle between 3.30 p.m. and nightfall. The 4th *Turcos* did not come up until after 6 p.m.

At the beginning of the action, the furthest forward army reserve, the 18th Division, was assembled near Berthonsart,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the front. It was placed at the disposal of the XXXIII Corps at 1.30 p.m., but its leading troops were not able to reach the Béthune road before 2 a.m. on May 10th.

Some little time later, we got to know that great disorder reigned at this moment in the enemy's rear, and that his Headquarters were most anxious as to the outcome. Preparations were, in fact, made for a hasty evacuation of Lens, and even in Lille the inhabitants were for a moment full of hope.

It was the late arrival of our reserves which prevented us from following up properly the magnificent success of the first day.

Hostile counter-attacks were rapidly organized but, in spite of these, we maintained all our gains on May 10th and 11th, and even enlarged them, though we did not succeed in capturing either Souchez or Neuville-Saint-Waast.

Some further advance was made during the following days in the northern part of the battle-field. The XXXIII Corps seized Carency and part of Ablain-Saint-Nazaire, and the XXI Corps gained the Notre-Dame-de-Lorette plateau and the trench system north of La Chapelle, while Neuville-Saint-Waast was captured in a house-to-house fight by the XX Corps. However, this laborious advance showed that the enemy had closed the gap and that the auspicious moment had passed.

The British Army also launched its attack on May 9th, and succeeded in capturing the first-line German trenches on the front of a division. Unfortunately, immediate counter-attacks deprived our gallant allies of the greater portion of their gains. The British attack was renewed in the afternoon but was checked everywhere.

In trench warfare of this description, bitterly contested as it was on both sides, there were but fleeting opportunities of snatching a fruitful victory. The enemy's reserves began to flow up within a very few hours, and his disorganized artillery succeeded in taking up new positions. Comparative equality in both effectives and losses was very soon re-established.

As early as the evening of May 9th, I felt that a brilliant success had just eluded us. Nevertheless, I decided to continue the offensive without a pause, until the Givenchy-Bailleul ridge was captured, although I fully realized the strain entailed on the troops. The Germans had not yet fully re-organized, and therefore I judged that we ought to try and enlarge our successes and improve our positions. More important still, I considered it essential to afford immediate moral and material aid to our Russian allies who were heavily engaged north of the Carpathians, and who had even then commenced that disastrous retreat in the Tarnov region, which was soon to bring about the collapse of the whole of their front. Furthermore, Italy was on the point of proclaiming *herself* on our side, so that it certainly did not seem the moment for giving her any impression of weakness on our part.

Consequently, once its original objectives had been gained, I projected for the Tenth Army an extension of its attack to the south, in conjunc-

tion with the Second Army which would ensure "the requisite deployment to the south."<sup>32</sup>

On May 15th, General d'Urbal had selected a new line of departure, which was traced by enemy strong points. Local operations for the capture of these points were continued until the 21st, but no appreciable progress was made.

May 22nd and 23rd were characterized by very violent enemy counter-attacks along the whole of his front, more especially against hill 123, Neuville-Saint-Waast and the Notre-Dame-de-Lorette slopes. These were everywhere driven back with heavy loss to the Germans. We then renewed our local operations and, at the beginning of June, the occupation of General d'Urbal's new line of departure was a matter of only a short time.

In the meanwhile, the British had carried out a fresh attack, on May 16th, on a front of 3 divisions. On the 18th, our Allies succeeded in capturing the whole of the German first line on a front of 3 miles, and to a depth of half a mile.

On May 31st, I telegraphed as follows to the Chief of the French Mission with the Belgian Army:<sup>33</sup>

Explain the situation to King Albert . . . In addition to the main offensive, the operations in the Woëvre and Vosges are to be continued, and new ones will be started at the beginning of June on the front of the Second and Sixth Armies. Explain to the King the advantages to be derived from an operation by the Belgian Army in the direction of Dixmude or, in conjunction with the XXXVI Corps, in the direction of Steenstraete.

On May 27th,<sup>34</sup> I had requested General Foch to arrange for co-operation between the Tenth Army and the British, when the latter renewed their offensive.

General d'Urbal's preparations were pushed forward under good conditions, in spite of great activity on the part of the enemy, and on June 10th we entered on the last phase of the preparatory operations.

The main objective was the Vimy ridge.<sup>35</sup> From north to south, the front of attack stretched for 6 miles, and 5 army corps were distributed along it, while 4 divisions and the II Cavalry Corps were in reserve.

The infantry attack was launched on June 16th at 12.15 p.m. Very little progress was made and the enemy's reaction, especially that of his

<sup>32</sup> Note No. 31 P.C.S. of May 14, 1915.

<sup>33</sup> Telegram No. 12,134 of May 31, 1915.

<sup>34</sup> Telegram No. 26 of May 27, 1915.

<sup>35</sup> Hill 119—hill 140—La Folie—hill 132—Point du Jour.

artillery, was most violent. On the 25th, General d'Urbal decided, with my approval, to suspend the operations.

This battle marked a distinct improvement in our methods of attack and in the power of our material. We had captured 6500 yards of trenches to a depth of between 3000 and 4500 yards, while the enemy had been forced to bring up all his available reserves, some ten divisions. Severe losses were inflicted on him, and we captured 7500 prisoners, 24 guns and 134 machine guns.

Here again it was shown that "the moment of success is a fleeting one, and the opportunity is lost unless reserves are put in at once."<sup>86</sup> It was also made clear that the enemy had few reserves at this period.

When our material resources were large enough to warrant us undertaking several simultaneous attacks on wide fronts, we might hope to force the enemy to accept battle as he stood, and prevent him from bringing up reserves from distant points. This was the basis on which I draw up plans for our future operations.

On May 2, 1915, the Austro-German forces had opened an offensive against the Russians. Though of limited extent at the outset, the attack was so violent that our Ally's line in the salient on the lower Dunajee was forced to give way at once. Being short of artillery ammunition, the Russians were unable to restore the situation and were obliged to draw back their left. By the end of the month, the Austro-German forces had reached the San river, where they crossed the Carpathians.

It was not long before the Germans greatly enlarged the scope of this offensive but, in doing this, they had to withdraw large numbers of troops from the Western front. The result, according to our Intelligence Service, was that the Allies in France and Belgium had a superiority over the Germans of 681 battalions<sup>87</sup> at the beginning of June.

From this aspect alone, therefore, the moment was a propitious one for an attempt to break through on this front. Furthermore, it was evident that it would not serve the Allied interests for us to remain inactive while the Russians were being defeated.

On June 13, 1915, I decided to form the French forces into three *Groups*

<sup>86</sup> Note to Armies No. 8192 of May 20, 1915.

<sup>87</sup> French battalions—1384 (including 1099 active and reserve and 285 territorial)

British " — 330

Belgian " — 80

Allied Total —1794 battalions

German " —1113 " (including reserve, landwehr, Ersatz and land-  
a).

of *Armies*, so as to facilitate the preparation and conduct of future operations. The Northern and Eastern groups were already commanded respectively, by Generals Foch and Dubail, to whom I had delegated the conduct of operations on the two wings. I placed the centre group under the orders of General de Castelnau, who was the most suitable of the Army Commanders for this important command. The selection of General de Castelnau was all the more important as I had decided that the Centre Group of Armies should carry out an important offensive at the same time as the battle in Artois was renewed.<sup>88</sup>

I selected General Pétain, who had just performed such excellent work at the head of the XXXIII Corps, to replace General de Castelnau in the command of the Second Army. It will be recalled that General Pétain, at the beginning of the war, had only just been given command of an infantry brigade, so that he had climbed to the top of the tree in less than a year. At one time, I had thought of appointing General Pétain to my staff, not as Chief of Staff but as Assistant. As a matter of fact, I had this in my mind in September, 1914, when I asked the Government to approve the appointment of General Foch *ad latus*.<sup>89</sup>

General Pétain had a profound knowledge of infantry tactics and was no mere theoretician, and I thought he would be of great help, working in close contact with me. After thorough consideration, however, I abandoned the idea and appointed him to the command of one of the armies about to undertake operations in Champagne.

As I have said before, the most important lesson which the recent battle in Artois had taught me was that simultaneous operations carried out by several armies would prevent the enemy from making full use of his reserves, and would force him to accept battle with limited means, wherever we elected.

The number of larger units available for operations was continually growing. This increase was due to the following factors:

- (a) The improvement of our defences and the enemy's passive attitude on the greater part of our front, enabled us to reduce the number of troops in the front line.
- (b) The stream of British reinforcements enabled them to relieve more French units.
- (c) A more extensive use was made of Territorials in quiet sectors, so that we were able to rest and train an ever increasing number of active troops.

<sup>88</sup> Personal and Secret Instructions No. 5415 of June 14, 1915.

<sup>89</sup> See Commander-in-Chief's Strictly Personal File, Volume II, Book 3, Document 3.

- (d) The formation of 15 new divisions<sup>40</sup> improved the distribution of our forces, which in its turn increased my power of manœuvre.

I have described how the development of our war material, though appreciable, was less rapid than I had desired. The increase in the number of batteries of French artillery, and the better training of its personnel, had begun to render this a most effective weapon. The output of ammunition was still far behind what I had demanded but, by virtue of a Decree of August 5, 1915, I had been able to draw on fortresses for very large supplies of heavy artillery, ammunition and personnel for foot batteries.

This increase in our resources enabled me to adopt the following general plan, namely: to attempt a break-through on one part of the front—in Champagne—while pinning the enemy to his ground in the Arras region by a secondary attack, to be carried out in conjunction with a British offensive.

The Special Instructions for the principal operation, to be undertaken by the Centre Group of Armies, were contained in my Secret Instruction of July 12th,<sup>41</sup> issued to General de Castelnau:

Our main attack will be carried out by the Second and Fourth Armies between Maronvilliers and the Aisne, and by the Third Army on the right bank of the Aisne.

The forces at General de Castelnau's disposal were increased to 29 infantry divisions, 2 cavalry corps and 800 heavy guns.

At the same time, I issued my instructions to General Foch for the operations on the Artois front:<sup>42</sup>

The object of the attack by the Northern Group of Armies is to break through the enemy's front, or in any event to gain the ridge from hill 119 to hill 140.

General Foch's forces, for this attack, consisted of 12 infantry divisions, 2 cavalry divisions and 300 heavy guns. These were increased later on, after British troops had relieved some of the French units in the line.

I at once got into touch with Sir John French, in order to make arrangements for co-ordinating our operations. I met the British Commander-in-Chief on July 11th, and urged on him the advisability of a British attack in the Arras region, with the line Loos—Hulluch as objec-

<sup>40</sup> These divisions consisted of Nos. 120 to 129, the 10th, 15th and 16th Colonial Divisions, and the 130th and 131st Infantry Divisions.

<sup>41</sup> Special and Secret Instruction No. 5937 of July 12, 1915.

<sup>42</sup> Note No. 5936 of July 12, 1915.

tive. In my opinion, at least 10 divisions, supported by all the artillery available, were necessary for this operation.

The Field Marshal first of all informed me that he preferred an attack in the Ypres region, but he wrote me on August 10th as follows:

. . . I am still of the opinion that the British could co-operate more effectively in the operations on the Western front by carrying out an attack at some point north of the La Bassée canal. However, in the last paragraph of my above-mentioned letter, I promised you that as soon as I had your reply I would fix the direction of the British Army's attack in accordance with your wishes, expressed in your capacity of Commander-in-Chief. I have, therefore, nothing further to say in regard to the general plan . . .

J. FRENCH, F-Marshal

This letter deserves a moment's consideration. The British Government had laid down most categorically that French was not subordinate to myself, and that he was responsible only to his own Government. The extract from the letter I have just quoted shows that he had drawn up a plan which was not in conformity with my views. At my request, he relinquished this plan and acquiesced in mine. In a spirit of real as opposed to conventional discipline, he subordinated his will to the wishes expressed by me "in my capacity of Commander-in-Chief." In the course of these Memoirs, I shall often be obliged to refer to the absence of a Supreme Command, which was one of the major causes of our weakness. Consequently, it gives me great pleasure to testify here how greatly the British Commander-in-Chief and, later on, Sir Douglas Haig, by their chivalrous recognition of my authority, lessened the consequences of this serious omission.

In the meanwhile, the news from Russia emphasized the importance of an early offensive. The armies of the Czar were evacuating Poland, and the Germans entered Warsaw on August 5th, Novo Georgievski on the 19th and Bialistock on the 20th. Three more divisions were withdrawn from the French front and moved to the Eastern theatre. Telegrams from M. Paléologue, the French Ambassador in Petrograd, reflected the state of mind of our Allies. On August 14th<sup>48</sup> one of these reports was telephoned to me on the instructions of M. Millerand, the Minister of War. The following are extracts:

The Russian Army has now been retreating for three months, during which the daily battle losses have been stupendous. All the officers returning from the front state that it is impossible to picture the horrors of this continual struggle, in which the artillery is without ammunition and the infantry

<sup>48</sup> Commander-in-Chief's Strictly Personal File, Volume II, Book 3, Paper 8-A.



without rifles. Our offensive is, therefore, awaited with the utmost impatience. . . .

I am assured that the same question is being asked everywhere: What are the French doing? . . .

I fear that this Army [Russian] has nearly reached the limit of its endurance, and is on the verge of panic. Apart from the Army, there is the nation. The Russian people are brave and patriotic but more than any other race, are easily swayed by compassion. I know for certain that the terrible sufferings produced by this war are beginning to rouse the masses. . . .

I, therefore, trust that our offensive will not be much longer delayed.

On the other hand, the idea of so important an offensive as I contemplated encountered opposition, for which I was quite unprepared, in the highest circles of the French Government.

On August 6th, the President of the Republic had received the members of the French Military Mission in Italy, and had informed them that he proposed to ask me for details of the forthcoming offensive. The plan was to be examined by the members of the Government and, if success did not appear to be guaranteed, the execution of it would be postponed. The President stated that he did not look with much favour on an *important* offensive on our part. He argued that it was essential for us not to be inferior in numbers to our Allies in the coming spring. When the time came to settle accounts, we must have real force behind us to support our claims.

To my mind, the terms of this statement constituted a dangerous interference on the part of the Government in the conduct of operations, and showed that the President had no longer that absolute confidence in me which was essential, if my authority was to be maintained. M. Albert Sarraut, Minister of Public Instruction, was present at the interview, and said as much to the President. The latter then attempted to lessen the force of his original statement, and explained that the Government would certainly refrain from interfering in the conduct of operations, and that it would limit itself to a study of the general conditions under which the offensive would be undertaken. He added that this was not in any way to be taken as evidence of any mistrust in *myself*, in whom every member of the Government continued to repose full confidence.

In the course of this audience, the President of the Republic discussed the internal political situation in Italy, where the Giolitti party had renewed their fight against the Government, and also that in the Balkans, which was beginning to take an unsatisfactory turn. He then went on to speak of the parliamentary situation in France. He said that there was

strong opposition to M. Millerand, but that the attacks on the Minister of War were really directed at myself. M. Albert Sarraut at once asserted that in no conversations which he had had with members of Parliament had any attack been made on me. On the contrary, all were agreed that my reputation in France and other countries stood so high that it was evident I enjoyed the confidence of all. M. Poincaré and M. Sarraut then discussed the various political groups in Parliament, and came to the conclusion that only one politician was really opposed to me, and that this was M. Doumer, to which fact I have already referred. The President was good enough to say that a crisis in regard to the Higher Command would be a most serious state of affairs, and that I was absolutely indispensable. He ended by saying that it would be a national danger to interfere with me and that, so far as he was concerned, he would never allow the Higher Command to be brought into question.

I will revert to this long audience in a future chapter, when discussing my relations with the Government and Parliament in 1915. Echoes of it reached me at my headquarters, when I was in the midst of preparations for the battle, the plan of which I have just outlined. The statements made by the President were really somewhat inconsistent, so that I did not consider it necessary to ask the Government if I still enjoyed its unbroken confidence, nor was I induced to alter my conviction that it was to our advantage to start the coming battle at the earliest possible moment.

On August 19th, I decided that the offensive should start on September 8th. However, General Pétain informed me more than once that he would require more time, and General de Castelnau said the same. The attack was, therefore, first of all postponed to the 15th, and finally fixed for the 25th. I was myself averse to these delays, for I dreaded the approach of the bad weather and could not forget the Russians, whose retreat was still being continued under terrible conditions.

On September 23rd, I issued General Order No. 43 to the Armies:

**Soldiers of the Republic,**

During the past months we have been able to increase our numbers and resources, while our adversary has been using up his. The time has, therefore, arrived for us to make a victorious attack, and to add another page of glory to those already inscribed with the names of the Marne, Flanders, the Vosges and Arras.

Thanks to your fellow-men, who have worked night and day in our factories, you will be able to advance to the assault behind a storm of shell-

fire, along the whole of the front, and side by side with the Armies of our Allies.

You will carry all before you. In one bound, you will break through the enemy's defences and reach his artillery.

Give him neither rest nor pause until victory is gained.

Forward with a good heart to free the soil of our Fatherland, and in the name of Justice and Liberty.

J. JOFFRE.

The artillery preparation began on September 22nd, the long-distance bombardment of bivouacs, quarters and rail-centres on the 24th.

The weather during the opening days was favourable, but it changed suddenly to rain on the night of September 24th/25th. There could be no question of putting off the attack. We had already expended a large quantity of ammunition, the return of fine weather might be a matter of many days, and our remaining supplies were not large enough for such a prolonged preparation.

The attack was therefore launched on September 25th at 9.15 a.m. The rain had stopped at day-break, but it began again soon after and fell continuously until September 29th.

The situation on the evening of the first day was as follows:

On the left wing of the Fourth Army, the XXXII and VII Corps had made a slight advance in the direction of Saint-Souplet. On the right wing of the Second Army, the I Colonial Corps, with heavy losses, had hacked a way through the extremely strong defences of the Main de Massiges.

In the centre, the XI and XIV Corps had made good progress in the direction of Tahure, and the II Colonial Corps towards the Navarin farm.

Divisions in second line had been pushed up behind the I and II Colonial Corps, while the II Cavalry Corps had moved to Souain, ready to advance if the II Colonial Corps succeeded in breaking through.

On the 26th, we rounded off and extended the previous day's successes. The second position was reached on a front of 9 miles, from the Saint-Souplet road up to the foot of the Tahure hill.

The enemy seemed to be disconcerted by such a violent attack. A large number of prisoners was taken, together with a great quantity of material, while the captured ground was littered with the enemy's dead.

At first, the German forces appeared to be quite weak along the whole of the second position which we had reached. However, our efforts to break through on September 27th and 28th met with no success. No longer supported by artillery, our infantry hurled themselves against

defences whose strength we had not been able to judge on account of the range and difficulties of observation. The lines of trenches were for the most part on the reverse slope and protected by strong entanglements and our artillery had not succeeded in destroying them.

In an endeavour to break through this line, General de Castelnau issued orders for a combined attack to be thoroughly prepared and methodically carried out on the front Butte de Tahure—Saint-Souplet road.

On the evening of the 28th, we succeeded in gaining a footing in part of the second position, namely, the trench *des Tantes*,<sup>44</sup> and even passed slightly beyond. As soon as General de Villaret, commanding the VII Corps, learnt of this, he decided to move all his available troops to the gap, in order to exploit the success. The 402nd Regiment was the first to arrive, at 3 a.m. on the 29th, and was sent forward in pitch darkness, in the pouring rain, and into unknown ground. It was impossible to arrange for any co-operation with the units on either side of it. At day-break, it was surrounded by the Germans, who launched a counter-attack against the two flanks of the gap.

Further artillery preparation was needed on the whole of the front of attack, before the infantry would be able to force a wider gap. Units had to be re-organized, fresh troops brought up and the more exhausted ones withdrawn, so that it was imperative to call a halt.

Between September 25th and October 5th, ten fresh divisions were moved towards Champagne, all of which I placed at General de Castelnau's disposal. After the worn-out troops had been withdrawn, he still had 35 divisions, namely 17 with the Second Army and 18 with the Fourth.

The new attack took place on October 6th. The *Turcos* captured the *Vandales* trench, west of the Navarin farm, without firing a shot. They advanced for about 1000 yards beyond the farm, to which however they were forced back in the end. A division of the II Corps captured the village and Butte de Tahure, and these were the sole results of this new phase of the battle.

Ammunition supply was running low, and an extension of the operations would have entailed a daily expenditure to which our output was not equal. Events were rushing to a crisis in the East, where in view of the recent combined advance of the Germans, Austro-Hungarians and Bulgarians against the Servians, we were obliged to take action.

I stopped the operations.

While this action was going on, the Third Army had been making preparations for an operation west of the Argonne "to cover and extend the main attack."

The attack, between the Aisne and the Argonne on a front of about a mile, was carried out by the 128th Division, supported by 28 field and 23 heavy batteries.

Launched on September 25th, at the same hour as the main attack, it failed completely.

The Tenth Army carried out an attack at 12.15 p.m. on September 25th with 16 infantry divisions, 2 cavalry divisions and 300 heavy guns. The objective of this attack has been indicated above.

On the 23rd, a violent storm broke over the Tenth Army sector, where the advent of bad weather also hindered preparations and air observation, and rendered movement very difficult in the trenches and on open ground.

On the left of the attack, the XXI Corps reached the Souchez-Angres road, while the XXXIII Corps captured Carleul Château and the Souchez cemetery.

In the centre, the advance of the III Corps was more difficult.

On the right, the XII, XVII and IX Corps gained some temporary successes, but were driven back, by the end of the day, to their original trenches.

For its part, the British First Army had taken Loos and reached hill 70 and Hulluch.

General Foch was induced by the British successes and the favourable situation on the left of the Tenth Army to continue the attack during the 26th, in the Souchez-La Folie region. The whole of Souchez was captured and a footing gained on the edge of Givenchy wood.

General Foch telephoned me for permission to continue the Tenth Army's offensive on the 27th. I acquiesced, but only insignificant results were obtained on that day.

On the same afternoon, the British renewed their offensive east of Loos, apparently with satisfactory results. Sir John French wrote me the same evening pointing out that his reserves were being rapidly used up, and that it was essential for General Foch to carry out an attack at once, in conjunction with his right.

I had not sufficient numbers of troops, nor large enough supplies of ammunition, to continue the battle in Artois without compromising the success of the one in Champagne which, in my view, was the more

important. Consequently, I ordered the Tenth Army's attack to be stopped.

The British divisions had lost two-thirds of their effectives and were no longer able to carry on an offensive. Sir John might call on his Second Army for fresh troops, but they could not arrive for at least 48 hours.

With the object of helping the British, General Foch relieved the British 47th Division, south of Loos, by the French 152nd Division, on the night of the 29th/30th. The remaining divisions of the French IX Corps subsequently relieved the rest of the British IV Corps, and took over the task of occupying hill 70, and of prolonging the battle-line to the West. This made it possible for the British army to renew its attacks in the direction Loison-Harne-Annay-Pont-à-Vendin.

However, the reliefs were delayed by the bad weather, which prevented any important action from being carried out during the beginning of October.

Some progress was made on September 28th and 29th on the northern front of the Tenth Army. A footing was gained on Vimy ridge and we reached hill 140, though we were unable to establish ourselves there. A further attack was made by the XXI, XXXIII and XII Corps on October 11th, but failed almost entirely.

Accordingly, on the 14th, I issued instructions for the offensive to be stopped and for the troops to be organized on the captured positions.

On the 13th, the British First Army and the French IX Corps had renewed their offensive, after having on October 8th and 9th repulsed very heavy counter-attacks. They reached the Hulluch ridge, but were unable to establish themselves there. On the 14th, the operations of his First Army were also definitely stopped by the British Commander-in-Chief.

This battle in Artois was the last one conducted by Field Marshal Sir John French in conjunction with myself. It was also the last of a well-filled career. In December, 1915, he offered his resignation as Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies in France, and his resignation was accepted. In these Memoirs I have repeatedly referred to Sir John's gallant and loyal commandership, and I cannot refrain, for the last time, from expressing how deeply I esteemed him, and how much I regretted to see him depart.

To sum up, the offensive in September and October, 1915, had been carried out on as large a scale as the size of our forces would permit: 54 French and 13 British divisions, supported by 1300 French and 300

British heavy guns, had been engaged on a front of some 56 miles.<sup>45</sup> The ground gained by these gallant troops has been detailed above.

In addition to his heavy losses, the enemy had left in our hands:

25,000 prisoners and 150 guns, captured by the French

3,000 prisoners and 25 guns captured by the British.

Our expenditure of ammunition amounted to:

3,980,000 rounds by the 75 mm. guns

987,000 rounds by the heavy artillery.

Better than any disquisition, these figures show what progress has been made in the supply of munitions, during this first year of trench warfare.

<sup>45</sup> The fronts of attack extended:

In Champagne—from Prosnes to the Argonne—31 miles

In Artois—from La Bassée to Monchy-aux Bois—25 miles (French Tenth Army and British Army).

## CHAPTER IV

### THE START OF THE OPERATIONS IN THE EXTERIOR THEATRES

*The Entente confronted by the problem of the conduct of operations--The Dardanelles Expedition--The Servian catastrophe--The start of the Salonika Expedition*

OF THE Powers which, during the last war, constituted the Entente group, none estimated the extent of the world-wide character which the conflict would assume. None had, in peace time, taken the requisite measures for preparing and assuring the direction of matters pertaining to a coalition. There was, in consequence, an absolute lack of organization which weighed heavily on the whole of the first part of the war.

Events themselves finally forced the Allies to a comprehension of the fact that, without co-ordination, their efforts would be sterile. It was then that they sought the means for remedying this lack of organization. In this way, I was led gradually to exercise my action in the exterior theatres where operations, at the outset, had been characterized by an entire want of cohesion.

The first part of the war may be said to have extended from August 2, 1914, to December 2, 1915, and, during this period, I did not intervene directly in its general conduct. My functions were, moreover, clearly delimited in this connection: I was Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North-East. My horizon was bounded by the front which stretched from the Vosges to the North Sea. I have already shown that my action in this theatre comprised not only the French armies but also the Belgian and British; for this I have given just acknowledgment to both the King of the Belgians and Sir John French. In spite of the title of "Generalissimo" with which the latter good-naturedly invested me, it was none the less a fact that it was in reality as a counsellor, accepted by the Allies, that I had several times to express my opinions in regard to certain operations.

As the operations developed, however, it was made clear that there



were inherent defects in official intervention of this description. Confronted by an adversary who appeared to have centralized the direction of the war in the hands of the German Staff, the Allied Governments were forced to recognize that the incoherence of their efforts constituted a source of weakness which it was imperative to eliminate.

The French Government, which was constrained by events to embark on distant operations, in like manner recognized the necessity of placing the direction of these various enterprises under one authority. It was this conception, as it developed, which led the French Government, on December 2, 1915, to appoint me *Commander-in-Chief* of the French Armies. This was a first step and obviously the easiest one—since it was a matter which concerned solely the Government of the Republic—towards the establishment of a Supreme Command of all the Entente forces. It was not until April, 1918, that serious reverses on our front caused the final step to be taken, and then I was personally no longer concerned.

During the first months of the World Conflict, the only plan of campaign which the Entente instinctively adopted consisted of arresting the German flood on the west, while the Russian masses brought all their weight to bear on the Eastern frontier of the common enemy.

The problem assumed a different aspect at the close of the battle in the autumn of 1914.

The Germans, at this moment, had been obliged to loosen their grip on the Western front and were directing their efforts against Russia. The task of the Allied Armies in the west was perfectly clear; it was to lighten the pressure on our Allies in the East by undertaking actions which would be as powerful as the state of our matériel permitted.

This was the essential idea underlying all the offensives which I conducted after May, 1915, and in which I strove to obtain the participation of the British and Belgians.

I have said several times that my point of view coincided entirely with that held by M. Millerand, the Minister of War, and Field Marshal French, both of whom accorded me their constant support. But, in respect of the British Government, we had to struggle against various tendencies, all of them equally dangerous. At one time, London maintained that it appeared essential to leave sufficient forces in England to guard against a possible German invasion. At another, Lord Kitchener wished to retain a number of divisions at his own disposal in order to ensure the defence of Egypt or to carry on the Dardanelles campaign. Again, it was a question of combating, in high British circles, a train of

ideas which had for their origin the tradition that Great Britain has always brought her weight to bear in a coalition more by reason of her gold than of her fleet and army. Lord Kitchener was a stubborn man, and to the weighty arguments which he advanced to the French Government I could merely oppose, with a like stubbornness, those which I considered desirable in the common interest. The time that elapsed before military decisions could be taken can be well imagined, when such widely-separated points of view had, in the first place, to be reconciled.

It was equally of advantage to assure the co-operation of the Servian army.

Following on its brilliant victories in 1914 (the Tser and Roudnik) this army had passed into a state of almost complete inaction. This inaction was, in great measure, justified in that it was due partly to the losses which our Servian allies had experienced in the short and glorious campaign between August and December, 1914, partly to the epidemic of typhus which decimated both the army and the civil population, and partly also to the munitions crisis which the Servian industries were unable alone to overcome. I was fully aware of all these difficulties. But the art of war consists in performing acts which, in normal times, appear impossible, and I considered that this paralysis of King Peter's forces was as dangerous for the Servians as it was for the Entente.

In March, 1915, the Grand Duke Nicholas was preparing for a big offensive in the Carpathians and he desired that the Servian army should operate in conjunction with the Russian left which was to debouch in the plain of Hungary. Some time later, after Italy had decided to enter the war on our side, she signed a convention<sup>1</sup> with Russia, whose object was to co-ordinate the efforts of these two Powers against Austria. Servia was invited to subscribe to this convention. In this case, the Servian army was to co-operate with the Italian right in an offensive directed on Laybach, instead of acting in combination with the Russian left. The plan of the Grand Duke Nicholas was, however, brought to nought by the Russian débâcle which started in the month of May. The distance of the Servian forces from their proposed objective was some 250 miles, and this was sufficient to cause the Voivode Putnick to draw back. He had preserved an unhappy memory of the offensive tentatively launched in Syrmia during the closing weeks of 1914. Servia returned to her state of inaction, from which she was only to be aroused by the catastrophe in the autumn of 1915.

As can be seen, each of the Entente countries only engaged in such

<sup>1</sup> Convention of May 21, 1915.

action as it deemed to be within its powers. The disadvantages to the Coalition of the absence of a supreme direction, which I have just exposed, will be clearly demonstrated by the events in the Dardanelles and at Salonika, which were to drag the Entente into a series of complicated operations, as are all those which have to do with the East.

Germany, for a considerable time before the outbreak of the World War, had pursued a consistently skilful policy in Turkey, of which she now reaped the benefits. On August 2, 1914, a Treaty of Alliance was signed in great mystery between Turkey and the Central Empires. This did not prevent the Porte from playing a subtle game for the first three months of the war. Aided by the hesitating policy which was pursued by England, France and Russia, Turkey was thus enabled to set in motion the slowly-moving machinery of her mobilization. On October 29th, Turkish torpedo boats bombarded Odessa, sank a Russian gun-boat and badly damaged the French liner *Portugal*. This was an act of war which constrained the Entente to sever relations with the Porte. Turkey's entry into the war on the side of the Central Powers was of serious moment, as it deprived us of our only direct communication with Russia. It was not long before this was appreciated.

During the month of November, the Russians took the offensive in the Caucasus and advanced right up to the walls of Erzeroum and the shores of Lake Van, driving before them the Turkish Third Army. At the beginning of December, the Dictator, Enver Pasha, left Constantinople in order personally to take command of the Third Army. Himself taking the offensive, he drove the Russians back, seized Batum, Ardahan and Sary Kamysh and threatened Kars. The battle to the west of the Vistula was at that moment in full swing, so that the Russians had no force available for opposing Enver's attack. The Czar's Government then turned to England.

On January 2, 1915, the Foreign Office received a telegram from Sir George Buchanan, the British Ambassador in Petrograd, to the effect that the Russian Government desired the Allies "to make a demonstration somewhere."

Lord Kitchener was at once consulted and he declared that England had not enough troops for the essential tasks then in hand so that he did not see how she could attempt any important operation against the Turks. Mr. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, intervened, however, and a reply was sent on January 3rd to the British Ambassador "authorizing him to assure the Czar's Government that a demonstration would be carried out against the Turks."

Mr. Winston Churchill had an idea. In November, 1914, he had had a plan studied for an operation against the Narrows. When the Russian request reached London he saw that a well-directed blow in the Levant might produce important results. The First Lord of the Admiralty consulted the naval authorities, some of whom were not only sceptical but even opposed to a naval operation against the Narrows. The English Admiral Carden, commanding the Allied squadron blockading the Narrows, was asked his opinion by telegram, and he returned a favourable reply, though this was modified by reserves.

This was the slender basis on which the decision was taken in London to organize a naval expedition against the Narrows, with Constantinople as the final objective.

The Admiralty's plan was submitted on February 2nd to our Minister of Marine, M. Augagneur, who approved it on the 9th and promised the assistance of a French squadron commanded by Rear-Admiral Guépratte. On the 19th, a naval action was opened against the defences at the entry of the Straits, the results of which were at once seen to be disappointing. On this, British naval experts proclaimed that the Fleet would not be able to succeed without the aid of land forces. On the other hand, a modification of the situation in the Balkans appeared probable. This led various personages in England and France to study the advantages of despatching troops to the East, with the double object of helping the Servians to take the offensive in Hungary and, by furnishing M. Venizelos with several divisions, of bringing about the Greek alliance which he offered us.

On February 16th, urged by these various considerations, the War Office gave orders for a reserve corps to be concentrated at Lemnos. Lord Kitchener detailed the Australian-New Zealand Corps (2 divisions) which was then in Egypt. On March 10th, he decided also to send the 29th Division to the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup> The Admiralty, several days previously, had made preparations for the "Royal Naval Division" to be embarked for Lemnos. On March 13th, the British Government placed General Sir Ian Hamilton at the head of these forces.

For its part, the French Government had decided to take its share of the land operations, just the same as it had consented to co-operate in the naval action. To this end, it had decided to despatch an infantry division to the East. This principle was decided upon on February 22nd, and the Minister of War then informed me of it. I replied that it was

<sup>2</sup> It has been seen in a former chapter that this division was originally detailed as reinforcements for Field Marshal French's armies in France.

impossible to draw this division from the troops I was commanding. At this period, my whole attention was centred on the battle in Champagne which required the employment of all my resources. In the event of this battle not succeeding, I foresaw the necessity of undertaking further operations without delay. From the little I knew of it, the Dardanelles affair appeared to me, from its very principle, to be constructed on a very uncertain basis.

From my experience of Colonial matters, I dreaded to see ourselves committed to an adventure which, though of modest proportions at the outset, threatened to carry us much further than we should desire. Confronted by my refusal, the Minister of War directed the General Staff to form this division from details drawn from the depots. On March 13th, a second division was added and the whole of this French Expeditionary Corps was placed under the command of General d'Amade.

This army amounted to 70,000 men and, while its organization was proceeding, the Franco-British Squadron delivered an attack on March 18th, as a result of which we lost several ships and barely succeeded in reaching the entrance to the Narrows.

The haste with which embarkation had been carried out obliged General Hamilton to disembark his forces in the first place at Alexandria. From there, he transported them to the Gallipoli peninsula, which Lord Kitchener had fixed as the first objective. On April 25th, one month after the naval check, General Hamilton landed his forces at the extremity of the peninsula, in the face of a Turkish army of 80,000 men, commanded by the German General Liman von Sanders. In spite of prodigies of valour, the Allies had conquered by the beginning of May but a narrow strip of ground. Their situation was rendered all the more precarious by the enfilade fire of the Turkish artillery posted on the Asiatic shore. This fire was directed not only on the Allied trenches, but also on the tiny rear zone in which were accumulated the ambulances, reserves, ammunition and supplies, and on the make-shift quays where the lighters discharged.

With a view to extricating themselves from the difficulties in which they had so light-heartedly engaged, the Government for the first time turned to me and asked me to nominate a general capable of bringing this difficult undertaking to a successful conclusion. General Gouraud, who had been commanding the Colonial Corps for a short while, was at once placed at the disposal of the Minister. The new chief of the "Expeditionary Corps of the East" took over command at the Dardanelles on May 15, 1915.

General Gouraud urged most strongly, as indeed had General d'Amade from the very first days, the necessity of an operation to free the Allied forces from a situation in which they seemed to be the besieged rather than the attackers, and to silence the artillery on the Asiatic coast which was endangering "the very existence of the Expeditionary Corps."

Two solutions had been advanced.

Having received large reinforcements at the beginning of August, the British effected a landing at Cape Suvla, which succeeded beyond all hopes. Two divisions of the British IX Corps found themselves for two days confronted by a few companies of infantry. However, for reasons which I do not feel entitled to discuss, our Allies gave the Turks time to rush up forces which held up the British troops a short distance from the shore.

The French solution was to land troops on the Asiatic coast. A subsequent advance would have the twofold result of thinning the Gallipoli front, and of occupying the positions from which the Turkish artillery was directing fire on the European coast.

For this operation, however, fresh troops were needed. The Minister had no longer at his disposal any organized force for this indispensable diversion, so that it became necessary to call on the armies of the North-East.

These were the conditions under which, for the second time, I was asked to take a hand in Eastern affairs.

On July 29, 1915, the Minister sent for me to Paris, and explained the situation to me. I explained my point of view which I confirmed by letter the same day. It was as follows:

The action now going on in the Gallipoli peninsula should not be abandoned, but should be carried on with the means required to bring it to a successful conclusion. At the same time, care must be taken that the situation in France should not be compromised by untimely withdrawals from that theatre. At this period, the end of July, 1915, it seemed to me impossible to withdraw any troops. It would be a different matter in September when the battle which I proposed to engage in Champagne and Artois had come to an end. Moreover, an interval of this duration appeared necessary to enable a definite plan of operations against Constantinople to be drawn up, and for preparations to be made. It was clear that our set-backs in the East were due to defects in the general plan of operations, and to insufficiency of means. I, therefore, proposed that a rational plan of operations should be drawn up and that, with this end in view, an officer of my staff should be sent to the Dardanelles to establish contact with the troops and obtain all necessary information.

My proposal was not accepted. The Government considered that it was urgently necessary to start operations on the Asiatic coast. General Sarrail had just been removed from the command of the Third Army, under conditions which I will explain further on. This, from political reasons, caused the Government much embarrassment. They decided to entrust him with the command of the Expeditionary Corps of the East.

Before continuing the account of my activities in regard to Eastern affairs, it appears advisable at this juncture, to make a digression in order to relate the case of General Sarrail. When the war broke out, he had lately taken over command of the VI Corps, which took a brilliant part in the operations of August, 1914. On August 30th, I placed him in command of the Third Army, in the place of General Ruffey. In my account of the battle of the Marne, I have described how my intentions were not exactly understood by General Sarrail during the operations between September 5th and 12th. I had several times to remind him that his operations should support those of the Fourth Army, while he seemed more preoccupied with maintaining contact with Verdun, which was quite capable of defending itself. Nevertheless, he emerged with credit from the difficult situation produced at one moment by the simultaneous frontal attack of the German Crown Prince's army and the threat to his rear by the German V Corps. On September 17th, therefore, I expressed my satisfaction, although he had been lacking in vigour in the pursuit of the retreating enemy. On October 1st, following on the recent operations in the Woëvre, I again complimented him, which shows that I bore him no ill-will for the capture by the Germans of Saint-Mihiel.

But as soon as the front was stabilized, matters of a political and personal nature took the place of purely military affairs which, up to then, had sufficed to engage his attention. He received all the Members of Parliament who passed near him, in particular M. Doumer, to whose machinations against myself I have already referred.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> General Sarrail seems to have made an exception only in the case of M. Charles Humbert.

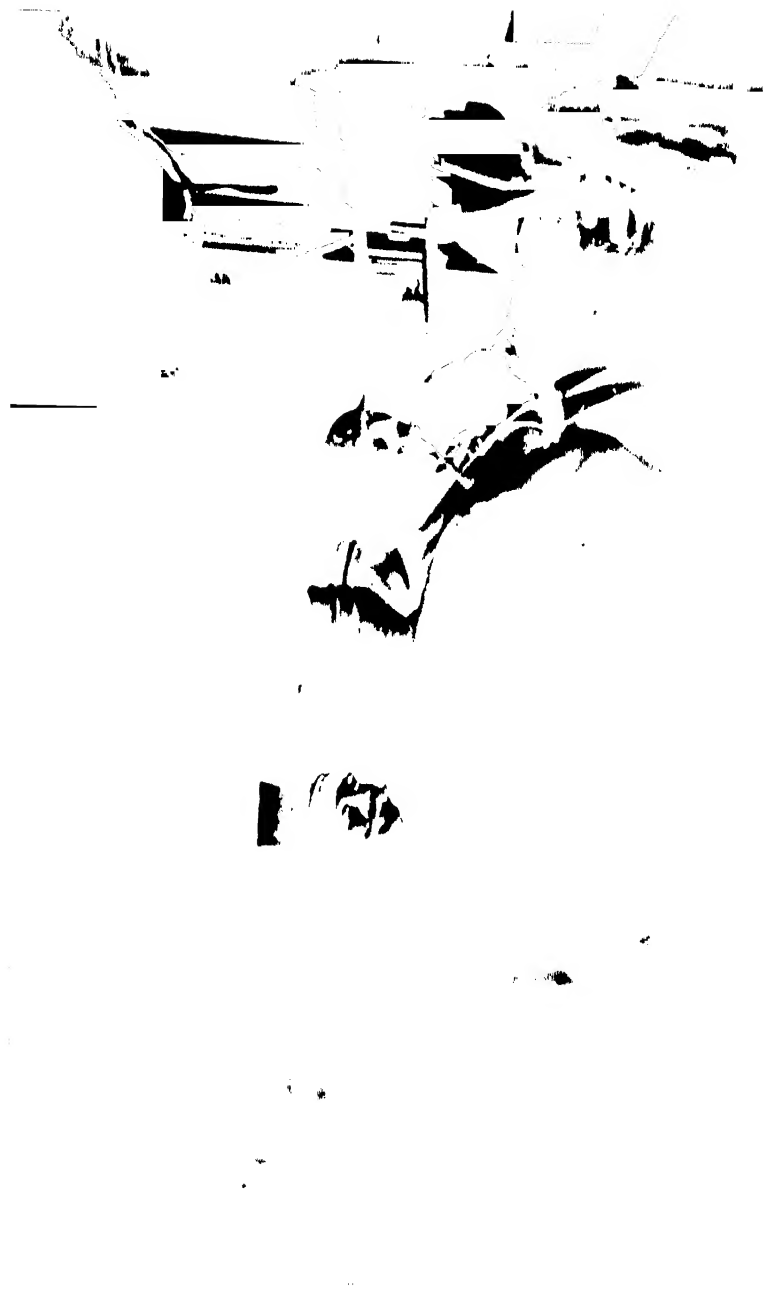
On March 28, 1915, the commander of the Third Army wrote me the following letter: (a)

"I have the honour to inform you that, as he was proceeding to Verdun, I met M. Charles Humbert, Senator for the Department of the Meuse, in the main street of Saint-Menehould. I requested him to leave the town at once, and added that, if he did not comply with my request, I should be forced to have him removed.

M. Humbert did not insist and left Saint-Menehould shortly afterwards.

Sarrail."

(a) Commander-in-Chief's Strictly Personal File, Volume I, Folder 2, Document 63.



IN AN OBSERVATION POST NEAR RHEIM.





A letter which I received in December, 1914, from General Foch,<sup>4</sup> will give an idea of the preoccupations which filled General Sarraill's mind.

Cassel, December 3, 1914.

General,

A Deputy, who is also an officer in the Reserve in the Third Army went to discuss military matters with General Sarraill and remained to lunch. According to the Deputy, the General spoke of nothing but politics, and what politics!

"Yes," said the General, "we are headed straight for a dictatorship. When the Germans give in General Joffre will be promoted Marshal and will hand over the reins to General Foch. That means the return of imperialism and the end of the Republic. You are going to Paris, for the opening of Parliament. You must remain there, don't come back. It is essential for the Chamber to remain in session and to see that no coup d'état takes place . . ."

I am sending you this information, which is quite reliable, so that you may know as much as I do. . . .

I am,

Yours etc.

F. FOCH.

To my mind, these were all insignificant details to which I did not pay more attention than they deserved.

Much more serious was the fact that in the Argonne, for the defence of which the Third Army was responsible, things were going from bad to worse, as I have shown. The way in which our losses mounted up, the increasing occasions on which we were forced to give ground, all went to show that we were far from establishing our defences on a solid basis; that the constant state of instability was demoralizing for the troops and that no commanding influence was making itself felt.

A period of comparative calm reigned in the Argonne from the middle of May to June 20th, on which date the enemy resumed his attacks, which were renewed on June 30th and July 12th. His partial attacks gave way to a system of violent offensives delivered on well-defined and sufficiently wide fronts and accompanied by a very large deployment of artillery and a plentiful use of tear and poisonous gases.

In view of the way matters were shaping in this sector, I sent up the 128th Division to reinforce it, followed shortly after by the 15th Colonial Division.

Sarraill had in the end understood that we should be in a bad way if the Germans continued to attack. He requested authority, which was given him, to strike back by means of a serious offensive, which was

<sup>4</sup> Commander-in-Chief's Strictly Personal File, Volume I, Folder 2, Document 16.

fixed for July 14th. On the 13th, however, he was forestalled by the enemy, who captured hill 285 in the course of a violent attack on the Haute-Chevauchée. On the following day our offensive was launched between the Aisne and the western edge of the Argonne. An immediate counter-attack drove our troops back to their trenches. A further attempt in the afternoon suffered the same fate.

Such a situation could not continue without danger. On July 15, 1915, I wrote to General Dubail instructing him to make a close examination of the conditions under which the recent actions in the Argonne had taken place, and to ascertain definitely the causes of our continual failures. On the same day, I sent him the following strictly personal letter:<sup>5</sup>

July 16, 1915.

(*Personal*)

From: The General Commanding-in-Chief,

To: General Dubail, Commanding the Group of Armies of the East.

In a letter addressed to you today, I have requested you to make a close examination of the conditions under which the recent actions in the Argonne have taken place, in order to ascertain definitely the causes of our continual failures.

I wonder, however, if the answer is not to be found higher up, and if the moral atmosphere in the Third Army is such as to permit the free development of that energy, initiative and devotion which are essential in war.

The matter is a very serious one and must be examined with the greatest care.

I appointed General Sarraill to the command of the Third Army at a critical period. Since the beginning of the campaign, undoubted proofs have many times been given of his force of character, vigour and energy, to which I have had pleasure in rendering tribute, more especially before and during the battle of the Marne.

At the same time, the Third Army, since September last, has submitted to the initiative of an adversary who is not superior in numbers. The Army's attacks and counter-attacks have never been pushed right home. The impression given has always been one of incomplete preparation and organization, accompanied by want of action on the part of the Higher Command. There has never been attempted a concentration of all available troops and means, as is constantly practised by the Germans in front of us. The plans drawn up by the staff are not as a rule sufficiently *studied*. A recent example is the study you forwarded me regarding an attack on Montmédy. Reports are always wanting in detail and are sometimes inexact.

General Sarraill complained to my liaison officer that he was not supplied with the necessary means to enable him to act. He added, moreover, that he did not ask for them as he was sure they would be refused. Now, with-

<sup>5</sup> Commander-in-Chief's Strictly Personal File, Volume II, Folder 3, Document 5.

out any request on his part, the 128th and 15th Divisions and some heavy artillery were recently placed at his disposal. I have continued to urge him to increase his demands for different sorts of ammunition.

Beyond this, all of us are working solely in the *higher* interests of the country, and I could not allow any *arrière pensée* to exist where the exercise of command is concerned.

In regard to methods of command, I am informed that the Chief-in-Staff has never carried out a personal reconnaissance on the ground. It appears also that he invariably refuses to take any heed of information supplied to him by liaison officers as to the morale of the troops.

A leader, by his presence alone, is able to watch over affairs, to stimulate energies and to diffuse confidence, and in this respect also the Commander of the Third Army seems to be lacking. In too many cases, his relationships with his subordinates are devoid of that mutual confidence which is indispensable (cf. the Bonfait case).

I have also heard rumours of several complaints which seem to imply that strict impartiality is not always observed in rewarding acts of courage. The worth and courage of the commander of the 8th Battalion of Chasseurs have been well known to everyone for the last 5 months, and it is only by virtue of his 25 years' service that he has been given the Legion of Honour. On the other hand, an officer of the Third Army staff, who is said to be closely connected with the Army Commander, has been twice mentioned in despatches, and this appears to have produced an unfortunate impression.

Finally, and this is of greater import, the Commander of the Third Army has not demonstrated to me a sincere wish to keep me informed of the worth of the generals and corps commanders under his orders, nor has he shown the independence of character necessary for taking disciplinary measures himself. He has several times avoided giving me in writing his opinion of officers who are palpably incompetent.

Taken all together, these facts are such as to weaken the prestige of the Higher Command, and to undermine that complete confidence which all under him should have in their chief.

Will you please carry out, with all discretion, a searching inquiry into these matters, and inform me in due course of the measures which, in your opinion, should be taken.

Please consider this letter as strictly personal. You should of course, however, notify General Sarraill of the inquiry you propose to institute, in so far as you esteem it necessary.

J. JOFFRE.

The task entrusted to him was carried out by the Commander of the Group of Armies of the East, with great tact and entire loyalty.\* His

\* The two Reports called for by Marshal Joffre in his two letters of June 16th were rendered by General Dubail on July 20th, and are to be found in Appendix VII, page 607.

In the words of the Marshal, they demonstrated "clearly and impartially the estimation in which General Sarraill was held by his chief and also by his subordinates."—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

convictions were well enough known to preclude any accusation against him of seeking political revenge of his subordinate officer; which would certainly have been asserted if the Commander of the Third Army had chanced to find himself under the orders of the Commander of the Group of Armies of the Centre or the North.

On receiving these two reports, in which General Dubail had so clearly recorded his opinion, the only thing left for me to do was to take a decision.

I withdrew General Sarrail from his command and placed him at the disposal of the War Ministry. I appointed General Humbert to the command of the Third Army, as General Dubail had recommended. Shortly afterwards, I remodelled the Army Staff; the Chief of Staff was appointed to command a brigade and I replaced him by the Assistant Chief. General Duchêne, commanding the XXXII Corps, was likewise relieved of his command. It will be remembered that, in writing of the crisis in the Second Army on the Somme at the beginning of October, 1914, I had occasion to speak in terms of praise of this officer. In order not to lose his services, I placed him in command of the II Corps and appointed to the XXXII Corps in his stead General Berthelot, whose optimism and intelligence could not fail to be beneficial to troops who for so long had lived in an atmosphere of constraint.

I will now close this digression which, to the uninstructed reader, may appear to be supererogatory.

I have dealt at some length with the reasons underlying my decision to relieve General Sarrail of his command because he had many friends in political circles, and these latter at once proclaimed that an injustice had been committed. They refused to look upon it in any other light than a manifestation of spite.

I have already explained how I searched my conscience every time I was obliged to place at the Minister's disposal a general who had done good work. Opposed as I always have been, and still am, to all disputes, I have confined myself to reproducing General Dubail's reports in full. These show that it was for purely military reasons that action was taken in regard to General Sarrail, and then only after full consideration had been given to exhaustive reports from a commander whose uprightness and independent judgment have never been brought into question.

However, it was not possible at the time to publish the reason which led to my decision. Sufficient embarrassment was caused the Minister by the protests with which General Sarrail's friends at once bombarded him.

I have shown how the Dardanelles affair had now reached a deadlock, and how the Government had decided to form an army for operations on the Asiatic side of the Straits. The commander of this future army had not yet been nominated. The Government made no attempt to go deeply into my reasons for having relieved General Sarraill of his command. Evincing still less desire to ascertain whether or not he possessed the necessary qualifications for such a delicate task, they nominated him Commander of the Army of the East. So far as I was concerned I had nothing to say—the Army of the East was not under my command—and I said nothing. But it will be seen further on that the Government's decision was to react most unfortunately on every one, and more especially on the successful outcome of this army's operations.

As soon as he had been nominated, General Sarraill established his headquarters in Paris in the Victor-Durny College (formerly used by General Gallieni during the battle of the Marne) and began at once the study of the projected operations.

In the meantime, the Government demanded my opinion more and more frequently.

During the meeting of the Council of Ministers on July 31, 1915, the President of the Republic asked me if the military situation warranted a certain number of divisions of the armies of the North-East being earmarked for operations in the Dardanelles. In my reply of August 3rd, I pointed out the probability of the German forces in France being greatly reinforced in the near future, that the highly favourable situation produced on the Western front by the Polish operations would be of short duration, and that advantage ought to be taken of this situation. Under these conditions, no action in the East should be contemplated for at least 6 weeks. A delay of this extent was necessary for reaching agreement with our Allies, for drawing up a plan and for concluding the preparations for an operation which presented all the characteristics of an important Colonial undertaking.

When the matter was submitted to me again, on August 28th, during a conference at the Elysée, I agreed in principle to the withdrawal from my armies, as from September 22nd, of the 4 divisions which General Sarraill considered necessary to ensure the success of his operations on the Asiatic coast. On August 24th, however, I received a Note drawn up by General Sarraill, from which I perceived that his plan had not been drawn up, that no decision had been arrived at as to the number of divisions which would be necessary for the completion of the mission

assigned to the future Army of the East, and that the conditions under which the expedition was to be organized had not been defined. To put it shortly, General Sarraill had merely carried out, in his headquarters at the Victor-Durny College, a theoretical and superficial study of the question. I at once instructed my staff to draw up a very concise Note, which was dated August 31st. In this, after making allowance for possible action on the part of the Turks, and for the conditions to which the disembarking troops would be exposed, the conclusion arrived at was that the 4 divisions, which General Sarraill had asked for, would be totally inadequate, and that 8 would be necessary if success was really intended. These would be in addition to Line of Communication troops and to the 2 French divisions already at the Dardanelles. I was, therefore, led to reiterate my former argument, and to request that no move should actually be made until a proper plan of operations had been drawn up, which it was for General Sarraill to do after having carried out an exhaustive study on the *ground itself*. In view of these considerations, and also of the delay in the preparation of the Anglo-French offensive (which I reported at a further meeting at the Elysée on September 2nd) I requested that the 4 divisions to be taken from the North-eastern theatre should not be placed at the Minister's disposal before the beginning of October.

My Note was forwarded on September 1st, but it did not change the point of view of the Government who, however, did approve the departure of the 4 divisions being postponed as proposed. The necessary agreement was sought with the British Government in regard to the transport of the French reinforcements, the organization of the command and the selection of a naval and military base distinct from that which served the Franco-British forces in the Dardanelles.

In order to settle these various questions, a conference was held at Calais on September 11th between M. Millerand, General Sarraill and myself, on the one hand, and, on the other, Field Marshals Kitchener and French and General Wilson.

At the close of a confused discussion, no clear conclusions were arrived at: no decision was reached as to the numbers required for the new operation. The problem of command was settled by the dangerously elastic formula of having a British Commander on one side of the narrow arm of the sea, and a Frenchman on the other. There was to be "complete liaison and entire independence." Finally, it was agreed that the operation could not be undertaken before the offensives which were

then in course of preparation in France, and that the Admiralties were to be ready to carry out the transport of the troops as from October 10th.

Now that this last point was settled, the Minister of War, acting in the name of the Government, instructed me on September 14th to assemble the 4 divisions withdrawn from the North-eastern front at Marseilles on the appointed date.

I considered it my duty to protest once more. On September 20th I made it clear that, in view of the operations then going on, I could not state the exact date on which the 4 divisions could be assembled at Marseilles. I forwarded to the *Comité d'Etudes de la Défense Nationale* a Note in which I emphasized the risks attaching to an operation on the Asiatic coast with a force of only 6 divisions, and drew the Minister's attention to the expenditure in men and ammunition which would result from this undertaking especially, as seemed probable, if fresh forces were shown later on to be required. "Responsible as I am for the defence of National territory, I consider that I should be guilty of culpable weakness if I did not warn the Government of the dangers of an undertaking which may deal a fatal blow to the sacred interests which are in my charge." But events themselves had already provided a tragic solution to the problem.

On September 22nd, Bulgaria mobilized. A totally unexpected destination was to be assigned to the French Army of the East. The Entente had once again been forestalled by its adversaries.

It has been said, since the beginning of 1915, I had been preoccupied by Serbia's attitude of inactivity. On June 24th, I had written to the Minister saying:

At the beginning of the war in 1914, operations were carried out in accordance with plans which were drawn up by agreement between France, Russia and England. This is no longer the case in regard to the present phase of the war, which is being waged under entirely different conditions. The relations between the Allies themselves, and with Italy, who has lately ranged herself on our side, remain cordial; but each army operates on its own account, without any general co-ordination.

The impression is gaining ground that the Allies are not "directing" the war. In a conversation with Major Langlois, our Liaison Officer in Russia, the Grand Duke Nicholas expressed this opinion. M. de Brocqueville has recently done the same, and a letter from the Italian Government to our Foreign Minister shows that they hold similar views.

It would appear that this state of affairs could be remedied in the following manner:

The French Government should propose to the Allied Powers that the higher direction of the war should be centralized at French General Head-



quarters, where plans for combined action and instructions for operations would be drawn up.

Each Power would detail a general officer to be attached to the Commander-in-Chief of the French forces. The mission of these officers would be to supply the French Command with exact information regarding the situation of their own armies (numbers of effectives, ammunition supply, state of the theatre of operations, etc. . . .) and then to transmit the plans and instructions drawn up by the French Command.

On June 29th, returning to the charge, I wrote the Minister the following letter:—

The necessity for a directing authority for the Coalition will never seem more evident than it does at the moment.

The retreat of the Russian armies has produced a strong impression on our other Allies.

Under various pretexts, the Servian Army remains inactive. The Italian armies fear that they will not be supported by the Servians and, in their turn, are forsaking the offensive for the defensive. In England, Lord Kitchener and part of the Government recommend the adoption of a purely waiting attitude.

If these attitudes are persisted in, they may have most serious results for the Coalition. It is essential that they should be strongly opposed . . .

Would it not be better at once to take the lead instead of simply advancing the theory that a directing organ is essential? The matter is pressing. With each week that passes, the danger of Russia being isolated is increased, and the future movements of the Austro-Germans are facilitated. . . .

I maintained that although diplomatic action could support our action in relation to the Commanders-in-Chief of the Allied Armies, it could not take the place of such action and so would be inoperative. I admitted that a general meeting of Commanders-in-Chief, or their representatives, would take a long time to organize and would, of itself, be of little use. I, therefore, suggested that advantage should be taken of Lord Kitchener's forthcoming visit to France to invite at the same time an accredited representative of the Italian command, perhaps General Cadorna himself. A conference might then be assembled to study how help could best be accorded to Russia, and the succession of German victories over our Eastern Ally brought to a stop.

It was under these conditions that the Allied Conference took place at Chantilly on July 7, 1915, representing the first real effort to obtain co-ordinated action by the coalition Powers.

M. Millerand presided, and he at once requested me to explain the object of the meeting.

I first of all propounded my fundamental idea, which was that the war could only be decided in the large theatres of operations, and that

it was there that efforts must be made. I next enunciated as a principle that the most favourable conditions leading to victory would be created when all the Allied armies were in a position to undertake a vigorous offensive at one and the same time. I admitted that the actions of all must be synchronized as far as possible, but asserted that the army which sustained the main weight of the enemy's forces ought to be able to count on the assistance, in the form of vigorous offensives, of the other armies.

I stated, in conclusion, that it appeared to me that the Franco-British and Italo-Servian armies were bound in honour, as by their own interests, to be prepared to launch a powerful offensive at the earliest possible moment.

No voice was raised in opposition to my statement. In the course of the Conference, the view was unanimously held that while the operations in the Eastern theatre were being pursued the other armies should act on the following lines:

The *French forces* should continue their local actions and renew their continued offensive as soon as possible.

The *British forces*, reinforced by new divisions, should co-operate in the French operations.

The *Belgian army* would co-operate so far as its means permitted.

In the Italo-Servian Theatre:

The *Italian armies* should develop as rapidly as possible the offensive which they had originated in the direction of Laybach-Villach.

The *Servian army* should co-ordinate its operations with those of the Italians.

It has been shown that, by means of their powerful offensives in September, these decisions were carried out in their entirety by France and Great Britain.

Italy did not succeed in obtaining the results which had been expected from her entry in the struggle. Her efforts were checked by the unfavourable form of her frontiers, the defensive organizations set up by the Austrians and the nature of the ground, with the result that the army on the Isonzo immobilized on its front an ever-increasing number of enemy forces.

On the other hand, Serbia did not judge it possible to act in accordance with the established programme. She continued to observe her policy of inaction, her efforts being limited to anxiously watching Bulgaria, who was imperceptibly drawing closer to the Central Powers.

Although I was unsuccessful in getting the Servian Army to resume active operations, it seemed to me that there was a possibility of our

being called upon, at some date, to undertake operations in the Balkans. I, therefore, wrote to the Minister of War on August 4, 1915, to point out the important rôle which might devolve upon the Servian railways and especially the lines leading from Servia towards Uskub and Russia.

In my opinion, if these lines were to be improved, action on the following lines was necessary:

In Greece, diplomatic action with a view to removing Austrian personnel which was maintained on some of the lines—

In Servia, the despatch of a directing staff and personnel for construction and repairs, and the provision of railway material and motor vehicles—

In Roumania, similar action as soon as possible.

As a result of these observations, the Minister of War sent a mission to Servia, headed by Colonel Bousquier, which was to operate at once in that country and, subsequently, in Roumania.<sup>7</sup>

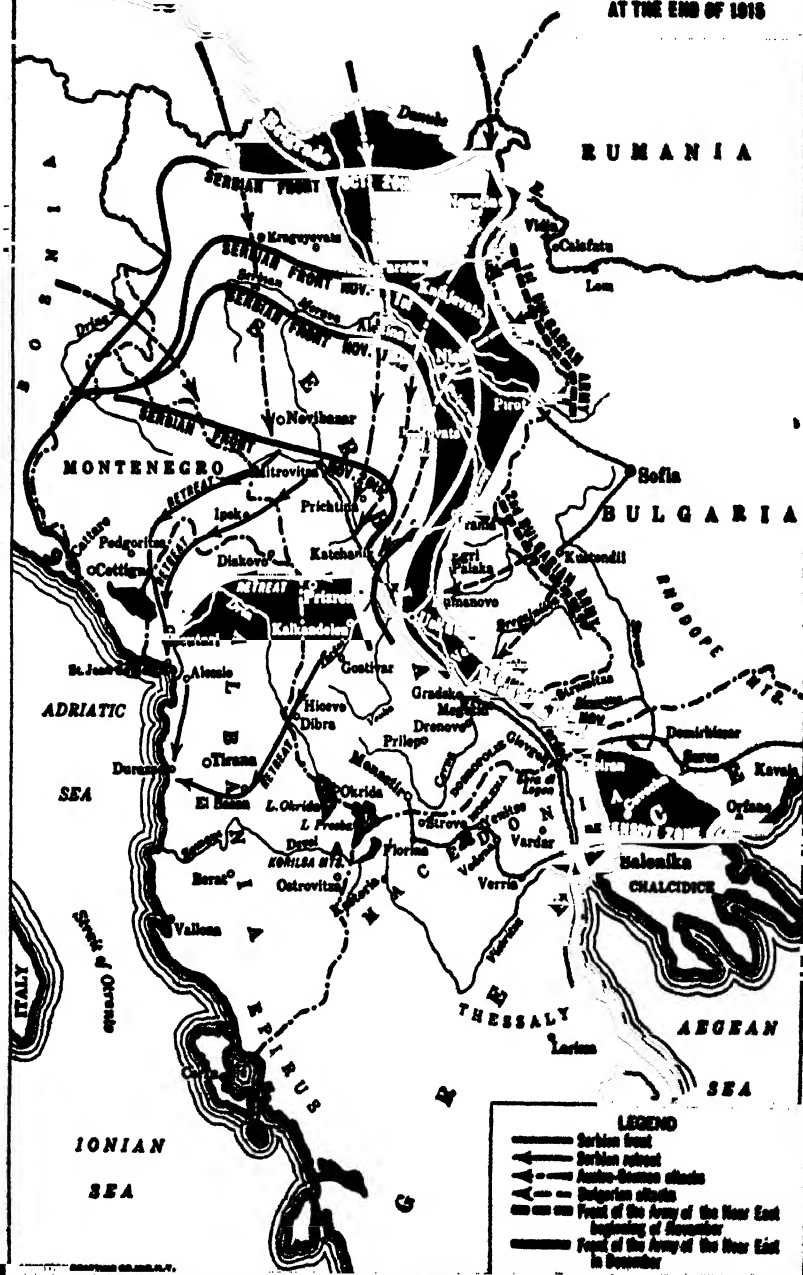
In the month of August, 1915, after a short intermission, M. Venizelos had resumed the reins of office in Greece. On September 21st, having learnt that the Bulgarian cavalry was moving towards the frontiers, he sent for the French and British Ministers. He informed them that King Constantine and General Dousmanis, Chief of Staff of the Greek Army, were of opinion that, under the existing circumstances, Greece should not consider herself bound by the treaty of June 1, 1913. By the terms of this treaty, Servia and Greece undertook to come to each other's aid, with all their military forces, in the event of either being attacked by a third Power. The King's argument was that Servia was already obliged to oppose her forces to those of the Austro-Germans, so that it was impossible for her to effect the concentration of 150,000 men against Bulgaria, as she had undertaken to do in the event of a common war against that Power. This was a prudent though specious argument, and M. Venizelos recognized the force of it, provided that aid was not obtainable elsewhere commensurate with that which was not forthcoming from the Servian Army. Were France and England prepared to furnish this aid? This question was at once transmitted to London and Paris, whence replies came that the desired assistance would be sent. So far as France was concerned, the Government decided on ~~September~~ 28th to despatch one of the two divisions, destined for the Dardanelles, to Salonika. At the same time, I was instructed by the Minister to move a mixed brigade, drawn from the Armies of the North-East, to the camp

<sup>7</sup> This mission reached Salonika on September 22, 1915, that is to say at the very moment that Bulgaria took the field against Servia.

H U N G A R Y

**OPERATIONS IN SERBIA  
AND IN MACEDONIA  
AT THE END OF 1915**

R U M A N I A



**LEGEND**

- Serbian front
- > Serbian retreat
- > Austro-Hungarian attacks
- > Bulgarian attacks
- - - - - Front of the Army of the Near East beginning of November
- ▤▤▤▤ Front of the Army of the Near East in December



at La Valbonne,<sup>9</sup> with a view to its despatch to Servia. In this manner we were committed, for the second time, to a distant expedition without preparations and without any concerted action. It is true that the operation was forced on us, but it was impossible to arrive at any exact estimation of its consequences. From the very outset, the operations in Salonika were to reflect the faulty conditions under which they were initiated.

On October 5th, the first French troops, consisting of the 156th Division from the Dardanelles under the command of General Bailloud, disembarked at Salonika. As had been arranged, the Greek Government made a formal protest against this violation of its territory. On the 3rd, the Government appointed General Sarraill to the command of the Army which was to operate in the Balkans, so that the idea of an operation on the Asiatic coast of the Dardanelles was definitely buried. General Sarraill arrived at Salonika on October 12th, accompanied by the leading troops of the 57th Division, which, under orders from the Minister, had been detailed by me for the East.

On the hypothesis that the Servian army would hold the zone Nich-Kniajevatz-Pirote-Leskovatz, and that Greece would at least assure her frontier against Bulgaria, General Sarraill contemplated concentrating his army in the area Pirote, Uskub, Velès. The idea was for this army to march on Sofia, supported on its right by a British Corps advancing up the Struma. General Sarraill calculated that, for this operation, three French Army Corps would be necessary, in addition to 30,000 British troops.

As had been the case in respect of his plan for the Dardanelles operations, the Commander of the Army of the East had drawn up his plan on a purely theoretical basis, which took no account of the actual situation of the Servians and Greeks, nor what could be accomplished by the French and British Staffs.

On the very day that our first troops set foot on Greek soil, King Constantine refused to approve the policy of his Minister, who once again fell from power. Greece declared her neutrality, and we were deprived of the aid of 150,000 Greek soldiers.

In regard to the Servian Army, our military attaché made urgent representations that it should draw nearer to us, and combine its operations with ours. Their Commander-in-Chief, however, the Voivode Putnick, strongly upheld the plan which comprised the occupation of a defensive position facing north and east to cover Old Servia, their right flank and rear being covered by an advance of the Allies on New Servia.

<sup>9</sup> Near Lyons.

This conception was tantamount to a refusal to appreciate the difficulties with which we were confronted. The result of it was seen on October 22nd when the Bulgarians had pushed up to Uskub and Velès, thus cutting the Servians' communications with Salonika. These communications were never again re-established.

So far as we in France were concerned, I have related earlier on how, at the beginning of October, 1915, our offensives in Champagne and Artois were in full swing. I have also shown how I had always objected to our forces, which were already much reduced, being wasted on exterior theatres. I appreciated the urgency of affording support to the Servians, but I considered that this should be limited to assuring their line of retreat and, in addition, to barring the road to Constantinople to our enemies. In my judgment, this could be sufficiently effected by holding Salonika and the line from there to Uskub, for which 150,000 Franco-British troops would suffice. These forces should be obtained from the Dardanelles Expeditionary Force, and this would have the twofold advantage of shortening the length of transport and of providing a plausible pretext for the evacuation of the peninsula, which would thus take the form of a manœuvre and not that of a retreat.

Unfortunately, my opinion ran counter not only to the Servian conception, over which I could exert no influence, but also to the thesis to which birth had just been given in London. Lord Kitchener had not yet made up his mind to abandon the Dardanelles, and with the idea of aiming a decisive blow at Austria he did not wish to undertake the Salonika expedition except with very large forces.

It was decided, in Paris, to wait no longer but to despatch at once 3 infantry<sup>9</sup> and 2 cavalry divisions, in all 64,000 men.

Measures were then taken with a view to reaching agreement with the British in regard to the numbers to be furnished by them and by us, to the arrangements to be made by the two Fleets for transport, and to the nature of the operations to be undertaken.

On October 5th, a conference was held at Calais between the British and French Naval and War Ministers. In addition to the 10th Division, which was already en route for the Balkans, Kitchener promised to send 3 divisions which would be withdrawn from the French front at the conclusion of the offensive which the British were carrying out with us. Agreement was easily reached as to the distribution of transports be-

<sup>9</sup>Including the 156th Division (Bailloud) which had already reached Salonika and the 57th Division (Leblois) then en route. The third division sent was the 122nd (General de Lardemelle).

tween the British, French and Italian navies, but none could be arrived at in regard to the nature of the operations.

On October 7th, MM. Viviani and Augagneur went to London. Kitchener, who viewed the matter on a still larger scale, maintained his original conception. No agreement could be reached, so Kitchener and Viviani crossed the Channel again and arrived on the 8th at my headquarters at Chantilly. The Field Marshal explained his theory, which was to assemble 400,000 men in the Balkans in order to crush Austria. Laying aside for the moment the difficulties of moving and supplying such a large army in a country devoid of roads and railways, I agreed that, if it were absolutely necessary, the British Government should draw on Lord French's army for these forces, provided that they were at once replaced by other divisions from England. Kitchener's reply was that the young soldiers under training were not yet ready for war service.

The meeting broke up without it having been possible to harmonize the two points of view.

Negotiations, however, were continued between Paris and London and, on October 19th, England agreed to supplement the 3 French divisions by 5 British ones.<sup>10</sup> But the British Government had gone forward unwillingly ever since it found that the general aspect of the affair no longer corresponded with its wishes. It decided, unexpectedly, that the divisions should move in the first place to Egypt, with the object of awaiting further developments and also of ensuring the protection of that country against a Turkish attack which had begun to be expected.

On October 14th, however, the French troops had entered New Servia. They had reached Krivolak, at the junction of the Vardar and the Cerna, and had established contact with a small Servian detachment which was holding Velès, but which was already cut off by the Bulgarians from its main body.

The delay on the part of the British Government threatened to compromise the hazardous situation of our divisions and to precipitate the Servian catastrophe.

At the request of the French Government, I made repeated efforts, between October 20th and 28th, to get the British divisions despatched. With this object, I went to see Sir John French but, as I failed to see any officer with real authority, I could obtain no definite reply, and reported accordingly on the 27th to the Minister of War.

The Government then requested me to proceed to London to obtain

<sup>10</sup> The 10th Division was already on the way. The other 4 were to follow at close intervals.



a definite and unequivocal decision. I was received on October 29th by the War Committee and was fortunate enough to secure the formal adhesion of the British Government, and the undertaking that sufficient troops would be moved to the East, without any further delay, to bring the total effective strength of the Expeditionary Corps up to 150,000 men.

On October 31st, therefore, the question of the constitution of the Franco-British Army of the East was finally settled. But there had been a delay of more than a month, at a period when the situation, from day to day, was becoming more and more unfavourable to us.

This was not the end of my endeavours to obtain the co-operation of our Russian and Italian Allies in an effort to save the unfortunate Servian Army.

On October 13th, I had already sounded General Alexeieff, Chief of Staff to the Czar, on the subject, and I renewed my request at the close of the London Conference.

As regards Italy, I telegraphed General Cadorna, suggesting co-operation by both Albania and Salonika, and General Gouraud, who proceeded to Italy, was instructed to press this point.

Neither of these two suggestions was favourably received.

Russia did not consider it possible to obtain help from Roumania, nor even to exert pressure on her to allow the Russian army assembled in the Odessa region free passage across Roumanian territory.

In spite of General Cadorna's agreement in principle, Italy would not approve the despatch of any troops to Salonika. Her action was limited to sending a division and a half to hold Durazzo and strengthen the forces occupying Valona. She gave it to be understood that the difference of opinion between France and England appeared to preclude the idea of a combined plan, in which she might have co-operated.

As can be seen, I had very great difficulty in co-ordinating the general efforts of the Coalition. But, most paradoxical of all, I could exert no direct action on the conduct of the operations in the Balkans of which the opening was attended by so many difficulties. An indication of the Inter-Allied chain of command at Salonika will suffice to make this clear.

General Sarrail, commander-in-chief of the Army of the East, was not under my orders. He was directly under the Minister of War, and I could act merely by suggestions and advice addressed to the Government.

General Mahon, commanding the British 10th Division,<sup>11</sup> who was

<sup>11</sup> The 10th Division had been relieved at Smyra and sent to Salonika. It was considered by the War Office as a detachment from the Dardanelles Army.

exercising the Inter-Allied command at Salonika at the beginning of November, 1915, was under the orders of General Munro, commanding the Allied Army in the Dardanelles, who, in his turn, corresponded direct with the War Office.<sup>12</sup>

It is evident that this extraordinary organization was full of complications.

I did not, however, consider that I was justified in taking no further interest in this affair, in spite of the disheartening difficulties which were thus created for me. By virtue of my position *vis-à-vis* the Allied commands and governments I was invested with an authority which it would have been criminal not to exert in the common interest.

On November 11th, I forwarded to the French Government a general survey of the situation in the East. I showed that the Servian Army, already cut off from Salonika, was in a critical situation; but that, notwithstanding this, it was necessary to persevere with our plans for its support. At the same time, the security of the Lines of Communication of the Allied Expeditionary Corps should be assured by energetic action against Greece, whose attitude was becoming increasingly suspicious.

On the 14th, I returned to the same question and sent the Government a Note containing a complete plan of action against that Power which I proposed for eventual adoption. I asserted that the acts of King Constantine's Government would only become dangerous in so far as we tolerated them, and that we possessed all necessary means for exerting the most complete and efficacious pressure.

In my Notes of November 21st and 24th, which served as a basis for the proposals made by the *Section d'Etudes*, I most strongly emphasized the necessity of obtaining, without any delay, the consent of the Greek Government to defensive works being started at Salonika, which were essential if the Franco-British Army of the East was to have a secure base.

Finally, on November 25th, to provide for failure of our efforts to rescue the Servian Army, or for this Army being forced to retreat into the mountains of Albania, I requested the Minister to take all the necessary steps to organize reception centres on the Adriatic coast, and to establish food depots along the lines of retreat of King Peter's Army.

On November 18th, the Voivode Putnick had made a desperate effort in the neighbourhood of Katchanik to re-establish his communications with General Sarraill's army. On the 22nd, he relinquished the idea of falling back on Monastir and decided to withdraw to the Adriatic coast. In the course of this frightful retreat through a desolate and road-

<sup>12</sup> General Munro had lately replaced General Hamilton in the Dardanelles.

less country, the whole of the artillery and train was lost, and the Army reached Saint-Jean-de-Medua, where we collected it, in an exhausted state, dying of hunger and decimated by typhus.

During the first fortnight in November, General Sarraill had endeavoured to assume the offensive north of the junction of the Verna and the Vardar, but as soon as he learnt of the Servian Staff's decision, he once more took up a defensive attitude. Shortly afterwards, on December 1st, he started his retreat to the Greek frontier which he reached, without excessive loss, on December 12th.

In the meantime, under the influence of the King, the attitude of Greece was rapidly transformed from a malevolent neutrality into a thinly disguised hostility. On November 5th, M. Zaimis, who had succeeded M. Venizelos and who still maintained a certain correctness with us, fell in his turn. He was followed by M. Skouloudis, who had no longer any doubts as to the eventual defeat of the Entente, with whom he considered he was entitled to deal as he chose. On the 9th, he informed M. Guillemin, the French Minister in Athens, that the Greek Government had decided to disarm and intern all the Servian, French and British troops which set foot on Greek territory.

This was a grave threat, and the danger was a serious one; 9 Greek divisions had just completed their concentration, 5 in the Salonika region, 3 to the east of the Struma and 1 at Florina.

I had foreseen this danger and there was only one means of escaping it, namely, by force. The French Government understood as much and, after a short hesitation, so did the British.

On November 23rd, a Note was presented to the Greek Government, in which a policy of benevolent neutrality was insisted upon, in accordance with repeated promises. To support this demand, an Allied squadron had been concentrated two days previously at Milo, under the command of the French Vice-Admiral Le Bris.

On the 24th, Greece gave way, and M. Guillemin at once formulated a series of demands: withdrawal of Greek troops from Salonika, the railway and roads leading to the frontier to be at the entire disposal of the Allies, the right to construct a system of defences at Salonika, etc.

At the close of a long discussion on December 5th, the King instructed Lieutenant-Colonel Pallis to proceed to Salonika and to come to an arrangement with General Sarraill respecting the execution of our demands.

The question of Greece's attitude was thus settled at the very last moment, but there still arose the problem of the future employment of

the Allied Army in the East. In this matter, a divergence of opinion was once more manifested.

In France, we considered it essential to maintain the Army there. There were many arguments in support of this. For instance, to abandon Salonika was to acknowledge a check more serious than that of the Dardanelles; it would cause the Balkan Powers, which were still neutral, to range themselves on the side of the Austro-Germans. To remain there meant arresting the *Drang nach Osten*, the future would not be compromised, we should have a base for later offensives, and it provided the only practical means of resuscitating the Servian Army.

It was held in London that there was nothing further to be done at Salonika, and that the Army ought to leave without delay. Arguments were not wanting in support of this theory. A Turkish attack against Egypt was expected at any moment; in Lord Kitchener's opinion, 15 divisions were necessary to meet it; as these troops could not be supplied in time from France or England, he esteemed it essential to obtain them from Salonika and the Dardanelles.

On December 1st, the British War Council, basing its decision on these considerations, decided in favour of evacuation. At the same time, it stipulated, as an essential condition, that the Greek Army should deny the Austro-Germans access to Greek territory. This decision was communicated the same day to M. Briand, the French Prime Minister, by Lord Bertie, the British Ambassador to France. At M. Briand's request, the Ambassador telegraphed in the evening to his Government "the effect amounting to consternation" which had just been produced by his communication.

On December 3rd, at a meeting of the British Cabinet, Lord Kitchener again expounded the point of view of the Imperial General Staff, and gave his opinion in favour of immediate evacuation. He threatened to resign rather than to lend himself to an operation which he considered certain to lead to disaster. Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Minister, was confronted by two absolutely conflicting sets of opinions, both categorical and diametrically opposed, the one to the other. However, as in his judgment it was more particularly a military question, he proposed to the French Government that a conference should be assembled without delay at which the military experts could expound their respective views.

The Conference was held the following day, December 4th, at Calais. I attended in company with M. Briand. The discussion that ensued was most confused. Everyone maintained his own standpoint. The British, on taking their departure, declared that the Expeditionary Corps must

be re-embarked with all speed. The War Office at once despatched orders for this, and the Foreign Office communicated the decision to Sir Francis Elliott, the British Minister in Athens. We succeeded in getting this decision postponed; the Allied Staffs met again at Chantilly, when agreement was eventually reached on this thorny question.

I have related how, as far back as June, 1915, I had recommended that each of the Allied Armies should be permanently represented at my headquarters by a general officer. Furnished in this way with the requisite information, I would be able to co-ordinate the military action of the Coalition. I reverted to this question in November, and proposed that a meeting should be held at Chantilly of commanders-in-chief or their representatives. The main object of this conference was to draw up a plan for concerted action, to which all the Allies would conform.

My proposal was favourably received and the meeting was held at Chantilly on December 6, 7 and 8, 1915. I have given in a later chapter the detailed report of the meetings held at this important conference, which marks a vital date in the history of the conduct of the war. It is sufficient to note here that I succeeded in obtaining unanimous approval to the principle of complete and immediate evacuation of the Gallipoli peninsula. In regard to Salonika, all the Allied representatives, with the exception of the British military ones, were of opinion that the Franco-British Expeditionary Corps ought to be maintained in the Salonika region. All, including the British, admitted, as a measure of urgency and without prejudice to future decisions, the organization of an entrenched camp at Salonika.

In this manner, the Dardanelles Expedition was liquidated, and under the least unfavourable conditions. If it had succeeded, it would probably have changed the whole character of the war; as it was, faulty organization and incoherent development had brought about its failure.

So far as Salonika was concerned, the Entente, owing to want of decision, had not been able to prevent the Servian disaster. Our future liberty of action in the Balkans was, however, preserved by the decision which I had just obtained.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix to Part IV, page 616.



## CHAPTER V

### *WAR AND POLITICS*

I CANNOT fittingly bring to a close my narrative of the events of 1915, without describing my relations during the period with members of Governments and the political world.

I have shown several times how important was the part played by M. Millerand, Minister of War from August 26, 1914, to October 30, 1915, in the vital matter of the execution of our munitions programme. Confronted as he was by difficulties which technicians regarded as insurmountable, by ever-recurring and ever-increasing difficulties, not once did he despair of success. He took every opportunity of showing his confidence in me, a confidence which never waned. Furthermore, as parliamentary opinion became more anxious and more insistent, all the more firmly and consistently did he defend my liberty of action, for which it gives me great pleasure once more to express my gratitude.

When the Briand ministry was formed on October 31, 1915, without him, as I shall relate further on, he came to lunch at my headquarters at Chantilly. Quite calmly, he told me that he departed without any bitterness, and with the knowledge of having performed good work for the country. "On September 26, 1914, one month after I became Minister," he said, "12,000 shell of 75 mm. were being manufactured daily. You will remember how I called a meeting of manufacturers and how I asked for 50,000. They all, without exception, replied that it was impossible. Now, at the present moment, the output is 150,000 a day, and all the 75 mm. gun material (to speak of that alone) is going to be renewed."

The following day, M. Millerand resumed his barrister's robe and returned to his law practice.

After the Battle of the Marne, all the politicians who came to my headquarters, Briand, Sembat, Barthou, Etienne, de Freycinet, Sarraut (to mention only the principal ones), re-echoed the confidence which was reposed in me by the country and the Parliament. This confidence was necessary if I was to support the crushing responsibilities with which I was burdened. It was still further increased by the moral authority which

I had acquired *vis-à-vis* our Allies, from the Belgians and British beside us to the Servians and Russians far away. The highest orders were bestowed on me by our Allies; Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, Cross of St. George, Grand Cordon of the Order of Leopold, all of which, in my person, brought honour to the whole of the French Army. Apart from these, however, I have described the friendly relations which were established between Field Marshal French and myself and how, in the absence of any official convention, our operations were thereby benefited. What I have said of Lord French, I can repeat in regard to King Albert, who neglected no opportunity of evincing his confidence in me, and demonstrating the friendship with which he honoured me, and which he has been gracious enough to continue.

I venture to give here a few examples.

In a letter written to one of my officers on August 30, 1915, by Colonel Génie, French Military attaché to the King, the following passage occurs: ". . . the Prince (sic) of Teck<sup>1</sup> invited me to lunch today, and talked all the time about the King of the Belgians' tour in France. It appears that the King gave him a wonderful description. What seems to have impressed the King more than anything else, according to the Prince of Teck, was the sort of veneration in which the General-in-Chief was obviously held by everyone, from private soldiers up to Generals. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

In the month of December, a similar note was sounded, this time in an official document. The Foreign Minister forwarded me a report,<sup>3</sup> communicated by M. Klobukowski, French Minister to Belgium, which read as follows:

Having learnt of my arrival on December 8th, the King was good enough to signify that he would receive me in the afternoon. He has always received me very cordially, but this time I noted a sentiment of affection which touched me very much.

On behalf of the Commander-in-Chief, Colonel Génie had just placed on the King's table an album of photographs containing a record of his visit to our front. "This is a souvenir that I prize very highly," said the King. "When I look at these photographs, I live over again a period full of nothing but satisfactory impressions. The bearing of the French Army has astounded me. The whole history of the world contains no such picture of soldiers after a year's war—and what a war!—so fit, so keen and so full of typical French good humour. To see them in such wonderful form, and to remember what terrible trials they have undergone, there can be no

<sup>1</sup> Brother-in-law of the King of England.

<sup>2</sup> Commander-in-Chief's Strictly Personal File, Volume II, Folder 3, Document 19.

<sup>3</sup> Report No. 367 dated December 16, 1915, from M. Klobukowski, French Minister to Belgium, to M. Briand, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

doubt what victory will be theirs. Really, France seems to me to have put forth a superhuman effort. The heaviest weight of the campaign has been supported by her, and with an energy and mastery that cannot be highly enough praised."

Then, as was natural, the King went on to discuss the recent decrease<sup>4</sup> concerning the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies. He considered them to be excellent and justified not only by the confidence which the French Army and the Allies have in General Joffre, but also by the long recognized necessity of obtaining unity of direction. This unity of direction could not be in more prudent hands. Where the Commander-in-Chief has succeeded so well is in having been able to husband his effectiveness so that they constitute at the actual moment—and this will be even more the case at the conclusion of the present reconstruction—a stronger army than at the outbreak of hostilities.

At the beginning of the war, the Neutral Powers were all more or less convinced of Germany's superiority; but the Victory of the Marne and the defensive attitude which the German army was now forced to adopt had produced a strong impression on them. As an example, although it could certainly not be said that everyone in Spain was friendly to us, yet our military attaché there informed me of the esteem in which I was held by the King.<sup>5</sup>

However, the longer the war went on without any apparent result, so did public anxiety increase. I must admit, moreover, that this intense static warfare was sufficient to weaken the steadiest nerves. Anxiety in Parliament and in the Commissions was expressed in the most diverse ways. By some, the French Command was blamed for not having yet found a certain means of driving the enemy from our soil. Others considered that we were at fault in delivering any partial attacks and so not making full use of our numerical superiority.

Uneasiness was also felt as to the freedom of action which the Minister of War had accorded me. Criticism was directed at my corresponding direct with the Allied Commanders-in-Chief. Exception was taken to the appointment by me of officers to the higher commands in the field armies, and my replacement of generals whom I considered incompetent. It was said that these were prerogatives of the Government which I had usurped, and the Minister was urged to recover his authority and his rights.

<sup>4</sup> The King was alluding to the Decree the text of which will be found on page 639.

<sup>5</sup> Extract from a letter dated February 22, 1916, from Colonel Tillion, French Military Attaché at Madrid: "Sir, as you will see from my report of February 17th regarding my audience of the King of Spain, His Majesty has directed me to convey to you the expression of his admiration. This is the third occasion on which he has spoken of you in particularly eulogistic terms." Commander-in-Chief's Strictly Personal File, Volume II, Folder 3, Document 67.



I do not propose to reply in detail to these various criticisms. These Memoirs are in no sense a special pleading. It should be recognized, however, that they reached my ears, and that I had given reflection to all these questions long before they entered into the minds of my censors.

It is true that, at the end of 1915, no solution had yet been reached of the problem presented by the war of stabilization. As I have said, an essential preliminary condition to any solution was the creation of a great quantity of powerful material of all sorts. I have already shown how the munitions crisis originated. Theoretically speaking, important operations should not have been undertaken until all this immense material was ready, and this theory found a certain amount of support in France, and in a large measure in influential circles in England. So far as the English were concerned, this could be understood; war was being waged on French soil, not on theirs, and the devastations were not naturally a cause of such impatience to them as to us. In addition, there was the question of Russia, which was brought up from time to time by our Ambassador there and which was not always taken into account even by those best fitted to judge. Consequently, while certain people, especially in England, took exception to my undertaking extensive operations too soon, others, and more particularly the Russians, considered that we were not doing enough. It was morally impossible not to pay heed to the appeals of our unfortunate Allies. Furthermore, as I have shown (and this has since been confirmed in German memoirs) our 1915 offensives were not without effect. On two occasions, in the Argonne in May and in Champagne in the autumn, we failed by only a narrow margin to achieve very large results. If news of our preparations had not leaked out, if the fine weather had continued, if fleeting opportunities had been seized by local commanders, Heaven knows how far back we might have been able to drive the enemy. This might have been achieved with even greater facility if only our Allies had not been in such inferior strength to the Germans. It must not be forgotten that, in 1915, England had reached the first stage only of her military organization, which was not to see its full development until conscription had been adopted; Russia was marching from one defeat to another, and Italy had only recently joined in the war.

With regard to my correspondence with the Allied Commanders-in-Chief, I judged that it was in the common interest and my clear duty not only to continue it but to develop it. If I had not been authorized to do so, I fail to see how the Salonika expedition would ever have been decided upon, with the Allies taking so long to come to an agreement. How

otherwise should I have succeeded in 1915 in obtaining from the Chantilly Conference consent to the elaboration of a general plan of action for the Coalition, whose efforts, up to that time, had been devoid of co-ordination. The interminable discussions which took place between members of governments and military authorities when the Balkan affair was first mooted, have left such a vivid impression on my mind that I have now no slightest illusion (even if I ever had any) as to the usefulness of these councils of war where 25 or 30 persons are assembled round a table.

I have already dealt with the question of appointments to commands and replacement of generals. If I return to the matter here, it is simply to say that, in view of my responsibility towards the Government, I esteemed it to be an essential part of my duty to be free to select my collaborators. I made no appointments and carried out no removals or changes except in the interests of the country. I have arrested the careers of those who were dear to me; I have promoted generals for whom I had no particular liking. I have made it clear that when I had to relieve General Sarrail of his command in July, 1915, my decision was taken only after having been fortified by an impartial expression of opinion from General Dubail. The case of General Sarrail, who was given one of the most delicate commands imaginable in the East immediately after his removal from the French front, is an excellent illustration of the manner in which personal and political considerations override military qualifications.

I now come to the question of parliamentary control.

No doubts have ever been voiced as to my loyalty to the Government nor of my deep attachment to the Republic. General Sarrail himself has never accused me of Caesarism, but merely of preparing the way for General Foch. But it is precisely my respect for the institutions of my country, and the responsibilities which I had assumed before and during the war, which have always induced me to oppose that confusion of authority which could not fail to weaken my authority (of which I was rightly jealous), to the consequent detriment of discipline and the favourable progress of our affairs.

Moreover, once they have arrived in power, I have frequently heard politicians complain of the growing interference of the Legislature with the Executive. They have done so confidentially, in my presence, but have never felt themselves strong enough to put matters right.

It is a matter of regret to me that the position of Members of Parliament in time of war had not been settled. The choice for a Deputy between his duties as a representative of the people and his military

obligations is a matter for his own conscience, and I respect his scruples. Some preferred to remain in the army to which they were called on mobilization, others thought they would be of more service at the Palais Bourbon.<sup>6</sup> There were others who went backwards and forwards from Parliament to the Army, which was naturally productive of false situations for men who thus served two hierarchies, and lived for a time among soldiers without discarding the mentality of a politician. There being no law on the subject, I could not force Members of Parliament to choose either the Chamber or the Army, and to remain in either one or the other. Nor could I prevent a Deputy or Senator from visiting the zone of the armies as a private person and listening to grievances of soured, ambitious, able or badly-informed soldiers. All I could do was to insist that all these Members of Parliament should submit, in the zone of the armies, to the same measures of control as were imposed on other citizens, and to this I paid particular attention.

It is none the less true that grave inconveniences resulted from the results, more or less correctly reported, of these interviews. There often appeared in the press articles which an unskilful censorship had failed to suppress, and in regard to which I was frequently obliged to protest to the Minister of War. In addition to this, unfortunate indiscretions were continually being committed, to the detriment of the secrecy required for our operations. After a certain time, the majority of the Members of Parliament who had been mobilized rejoined the Chamber. As from this moment, there came into existence a certain state of mind tending to the establishment of a "Parliamentary Control" over the operations.

I am content to leave to jurists the task, in the future, of discussing whether this pretension has a solid foundation or not. I can only say that it always seemed to me to be inadmissible and that I opposed it with all my force.

I cannot do better than to quote a personal letter which I wrote to the Minister of War on June 26, 1915, and which gives an exact epitome of my views. Today, I find nothing to add to it, nor anything that I would retract. I am convinced that, if the Government had openly embraced my opinion, in which it really concurred, it would have spared itself many disappointments and lessened the difficulties of the Higher Command whose burden was already heavy enough.

From: The General Commander-in-Chief Armies of the North-East,

To: The Minister of War.

*Personal.*

<sup>6</sup> Chamber of Deputies.—Translator.

In the course of the speech which he made yesterday in the Chamber, the Premier admitted that the "exigencies of military action impose inevitable restrictions" on the exercise of parliamentary control and on the movement of Members of Parliament in the zone of the armies.

With the object of preventing any misunderstanding in the application of this principle, I have the honour to inform you of what, in my opinion, should be the scope of these restrictions.

It is evident that Members of Parliament can move about, as private individuals, in the zone of the armies, so long as they submit to the regulations governing all citizens.

On the other hand, no parliamentary control can exist in the armies for, in practice, this control would tend seriously to affect the moral discipline of the army and its confidence in its leaders, on both of which depend victory and the safety of the country.

I have already reported to you on the attitude of certain politicians and the interviews held by them at the front, which illustrate most clearly the reality of the dangers I have indicated.

In war, authority and responsibility cannot be shared. Each military chief controls the actions of his subordinates, and is himself responsible to his own chiefs for all he does. The Commander-in-Chief is responsible to the Government, who can replace him if they do not approve of his actions.

There can exist no other control during a war.

J. JOFFRE.

I know that this view was shared by M. Millerand, who loyally and firmly acted in accordance with his ideas. But his secure position was in the end undermined by the continual struggle against intrigues directed either against him personally or against my freedom of action. He had refused to accept an Under-Secretary of State for War. In June, 1915, however, he was obliged to agree to the appointment of M. Albert Thomas as Under-Secretary in Charge of the Artillery Department; in July, to MM. J. Thierry and Justin Godard being appointed to the Quartermasters and Medical Departments respectively; and in September to M. René Besnard to the Air Service. The Ministry fell at the end of October, however, in spite of this array of Under-Secretaries.

M. Briand was entrusted with the task of forming the new Ministry. He had a hard task to effect a combination. It seemed advisable for a soldier and a sailor to be appointed to the Ministries of War and Marine. At the Cabinet Meeting which was held at the Elysée on October 23rd, I was asked my opinion as to the projected change at the Ministry of War. First of all, I said that I was in favour of M. Millerand being retained in office. It was then objected that, for reasons of a political nature, with which I am not concerned, M. Millerand would have to go. I refused the appointment for myself and said to M. Briand: "If you insist

on having a soldier as Minister of War, take Dubail.<sup>7</sup> He is intelligent, has plenty of common sense and is well-balanced. In my opinion he is the most suitable for this post." Gallieni's name was then put forward. "So far as I am concerned," I said, "I have no objection." It did not appear to me at the moment that the question of the choice of a Minister of War had really emerged from the hypothetical stage, such as precedes the formation of any ministerial combination.

On October 26th, while on a visit to the Somme, I met M. Poincaré who had arranged to meet the King of England. I took advantage of this, to explain to the President of the Republic my views in regard to the direction of the war. While I considered it natural that the Government should retain all its powers in respect of the general conduct of the war, I was none the less of the opinion that the Commander-in-Chief must be accorded full liberty of action concerning the direction of operations. The President readily admitted the justice of my contention. He said that the future Minister of War had not yet been definitely chosen, but that General Gallieni appeared to have the best chance. He added that, no matter who should be appointed, I should retain freedom of action commensurate with my responsibilities, both as regards the conduct of operations and the choice of personnel.

In order that there should be no misunderstanding as to my views, I had a Note drawn up by my staff on October 28th for the President of the Republic. On the same day, I went to see M. Briand who confirmed that, in the event of General Gallieni being appointed Minister of War, my liberty of action would in no way be restricted, but rather enlarged.

The question was of capital importance, for the manner in which it was settled would have a decisive influence on the development of the operations.

The problem, in theory, is quite simple.

The Government alone has at its disposal all the resources of the country and can co-ordinate all its forms of activity—military, diplomatic and economic. On the Government, therefore, devolves the general conducts of the war. In accordance with the objects indicated, the task of the Commander-in-Chief is to distribute the forces placed at his disposal in the various theatres of operations, and to select the appropriate means.

In practice, however, the problem is infinitely more complicated. It is often difficult to draw a definite line between matters purely political and strategical. This problem, of itself, is a sufficiently difficult one, but it becomes still more so when complicated by the existence of a coalition,

<sup>7</sup> General Dubail was commanding the Group of Armies of the East.

where political and military interests not only overlap but often clash. The Dardanelles and the Balkans were striking examples of this. In fact, while it is essential, for the proper conduct of a war, that the powers and responsibilities of each should be clearly defined, it is even more important that the Commander-in-Chief should feel that he has behind him the confidence of the Government and the country; for it is he, finally, who has to bear the pressure of events. In other words, in this connection more than in anything else, the value of institutions lies in the spirit with which they are applied.

Now, there came into being at this period of the war, a current of opinion apparently directed at a modification of powers and at investing the future Minister of War with the supreme direction of operations. Apart from General Gallieni, who would have been perfectly capable of this, such a solution was in my opinion a dangerous one. In support of this, it was sufficient for me to ask if this would still be applicable in the event of the fall of the Ministry (and Ministries are notoriously unstable) and of General Gallieni being replaced by a civilian, who could not possibly claim to direct operations. In the event of General Gallieni being replaced by another military officer, there would be the risk of operations being entrusted to a new directing authority every time the Ministry should fall. It did not require much imagination to picture the inextricable complications which such changes would create in the conduct of our military affairs.

M. Briand was a clever man and an able politician. He may not perhaps have cared to attack directly the obstacles in his path, but he did not fail to perceive them. In the course of his Ministerial declaration on November 3, 1915, he found a happy definition for the policy of the new Government—"A united front." It was not possible to arrive at this unity without concerted action on the part of the Allies. But, seeing that a supreme command was yet to be created, this action was dependent upon the establishment of a general plan. The Prime Minister knew that all my efforts were directed to this end, which I should probably attain at the Conference to be held the following month at my headquarters.

But, before united action on the part of the Allies could be reached, it was essential for ourselves to put it into practice. M. Briand undertook this task with a praiseworthy skilfulness.

In the first place, the powers and prerogatives of the Minister of War and the Commander-in-Chief had to be defined, and I drew up myself, for the Prime Minister, the following main principles:

I was to be nominated Commander-in-Chief of all the French armies, no matter in what theatre they might be operating. I was to be assisted in this greatly enlarged task by a general officer, who was to attend to current affairs, replace me during my absence and to act as my representative on those fronts where there might be especial need of my directing action.

The Minister of War was to remain responsible for all resources in the country (recruiting, training, manufactures) and for their despatch to the different theatres, in accordance with the requirements indicated by me.

Both the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister agreed with this view and it only remained to secure the adhesion of Gallieni who, in the meanwhile, had been selected as Minister of War.

On October 30th, as soon as the Ministry was formed, M. Briand requested me to go and see him. I had returned from London on the 31st and went the same evening to the Foreign Office, where I found Gallieni. The Prime Minister said that, before anything else, it was essential that Gallieni and myself should be in agreement and that, as evidence of it, he would ask us to shake hands in front of him—which we did most willingly.<sup>8</sup>

The next question was definitely to settle the division of authority between the Minister of War and myself.

I have shown how, at this moment, the Entente was struggling with the Balkan question, which made it clear how urgent it was for us Frenchmen to solve our own problems. M. Briand, as I have said, had agreed with M. Poincaré to extend my authority to cover all the theatres where French troops were engaged. Opposition, however, was forthcoming in the Chamber. General Gallieni's friends maintained that it was for him to assume the general direction of operations, so that the Government vessel should tack about prudently, instead of running into port with all sails set.

It was at this period that an unforeseen incident occurred which made clear to me the dangers of still further confusion, if this matter was not settled without delay.

<sup>8</sup> On October 29th General Gallieni, who had just accepted the appointment as Minister of War, had written me as follows:

"My dear Joffre,

I cannot, under the existing circumstances, refuse this new duty.

You know that you can count on me just the same as before in Madagascar, when we constructed the entrenched Camp at Diego-Suarez together.

I will support you and our heroic soldiers to the utmost.

Affectionately yours—Gallieni."

Commander-in-Chief's Strictly Personal File, Volume II, Folder 3, Document 32.

General Alexeieff, Chief of Staff to the Czar, had sent me a proposed plan of operations, which reached me through the intermediary of the Foreign Minister.\*

On November 24th, I received a summons to attend a meeting of the Supreme Council of Defence on the following day. The programme for this meeting included a discussion of this plan of operations.

As soon as the meeting was opened, I observed that this was a purely military question which concerned me alone. I declared that, if I was not to have full liberty to shoulder my responsibilities myself, I was prepared to ask to be relieved of my command. M. Briand admitted the justness of my request. I took advantage of the favourable situation created by this incident to insist on a decision being finally taken in regard to the question of command, which was still in a dangerously vague state.

On November 28th, MM. Sembat and Berthelot came to lunch at my headquarters. The latter, a true friend of mine, and who kept me informed of political events, described to me the after-effects of this meeting of the Council of National Defence. He said that I had been well-advised in expressing my opinion so categorically to M. Briand. The result was that the question of unity of command had been given a step forward and, so he assured me, the solution would be officially adopted within three days.

In fact, there were published on December 2nd, the following report and decrees, which extended my authority over all the French Armies, and conferred on me the title of Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies.

Paris, December 2, 1915.

Mr. President,

Article I of Decree No. 28 of October 28, 1913, lays down that the Government, by virtue of its responsibility for the vital interests of the country, is alone qualified to determine the political objects of a war. In the case of more than one frontier being involved, it is for the government to indicate the principal adversary against whom the larger portion of the nation's forces should be directed. Consequently, the distribution of means and resources is made by the Government, who then places them at the entire disposal of the respective commanders in the various theatres of operations.

Now, unity of direction is essential for the proper conduct of a war, and it is proved by actual experience at the present time in several theatres that this can only be assured by having at the head of all our armies one man, who alone will be responsible for purely military operations.

\* This plan was brought to my cognizance by a telegram from General de Laguiche, our Military Attaché in Russia. In this telegram, on behalf of General Alexeieff, de Laguiche asked me my opinion regarding a plan of operations for the Allied Armies in the Balkans.



With this object in view, I submit the enclosed draft decrees for your approval.

I have the honour to be, Mr. President, your obedient servant,

GALLIENI,  
Minister of War.

### DECREE

The President of the French Republic,  
In view of the Law of March 16, 1882, on the administration of the Army,  
In view of the Decree of January 20, 1892, regarding the organization of the High Command and Staff of the Army,  
In view of the Decree of October 28, 1913, regulating the employment of the Larger Units,  
In view of the Decree of December 2, 1913, concerning service in the Field,  
hereby decrees as follows:

*Article I.* The Command of the National Armies, with the exception of the forces in action in theatres of operations under the jurisdiction of the Minister for the Colonies, of the Commander-in-Chief of the land and sea forces of North Africa and of the Resident General and High Commissioner of the Republic in Morocco, is entrusted to a General of Division, who will bear the title of "Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies."

*Article II.* Further decrees and instructions will be promulgated defining the conditions governing the application of the present decree.

Signed in Paris, December 2, 1915.

R. POINCARÉ.

For the President of the Republic  
The Minister of War  
Gallieni.

The President of the French Republic,  
In view of the Decree of December 2, 1915, instituting a Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies,

hereby decrees:

*Single Article.* General Joffre, Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies of the North-East, is appointed Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies.

Signed in Paris, December 2, 1915.

R. POINCARÉ.

For the President of the Republic,  
The Minister of War  
Gallieni.

On December 2, 1915, the day these two decrees were signed, General Duparge, Secretary-General to the President's Household, telephoned

me at 12.30 p.m. to say that M. Poincaré would receive me about 2.30 p.m.

General de Castelnau, commanding the Group of Armies of the Centre, arrived at my headquarters at the very moment when I was about to leave in my car for the Elysée. I had sent for him in the morning as I wished to inform him that I intended to appoint him as my assistant, in view of the projected extension of my functions in the near future. I asked General de Castelnau to come with me in my car and, on our way to Paris, I told him of the forthcoming changes in the Higher Command. De Castelnau assured me that he would hold himself entirely at my disposal, that he would accept any appointment I proposed, on the condition that he remained under my orders.

De Castelnau left me as we were entering Paris. His own car had followed and he returned in it to his headquarters.

As soon as I arrived at the Elysée, I was received by the President, who informed me that the Cabinet had met and had decided that very morning on the re-organization of command. The Decrees, which I have just reproduced, would be signed by himself that evening.

On leaving the Elysée, I proceeded to the Foreign Office, where M. Briand confirmed the news just given me by the President.

M. Philippe Berthelot described to me how M. Briand had induced General Gallieni to accept the new organization. He spoke to him as follows, in the presence of the President: "In view of the operations which have been going on for some time in exterior theatres, it is essential to have a Commander-in-Chief of all the French Armies. There can be no objection to this in principle. So far as regards the Commander-in-Chief, it could only be yourself or Joffre. In your capacity as Minister, and if you assumed at the same time the direction of operations, you would be obliged in the Chamber and in Committees to answer every question about past, present and future operations. You will agree with me that such a situation could not for a moment be contemplated. Therefore, you cannot direct operations; it must be Joffre."

Gallieni had at once agreed, and, as has been seen, it was he who signed the report accompanying the Decrees.

In this manner, and thanks to M. Briand's skilful handling, my authority emerged in heightened form from this political crisis, instead of suffering the curtailment for which certain intrigues had worked.



PART FOUR

THE ALLIED GENERAL OFFENSIVE IN 1916



## PREAMBLE

**W**HILE the year 1915, as seen from our side, represents a period of material preparation, a phase filled with individual efforts, unsuccessful ventures and costly experiments, the outstanding events of which were the Russian defeat and the Servian catastrophe, the year 1916 marks the earliest attempt at a united effort on a great scale. For the first time since the war began, the Allies succeeded in establishing a general plan of action, which proves that the dangers resulting from the absence of any unity in the command had become apparent. What was still better than devising a plan, they put it into execution. There were still many omissions, gaps, delays, hesitations, and how dearly we paid for them is shown in the pitiful and disappointing results that were obtained from Roumania's entrance into the war. The fact, nevertheless, remains that in spite of the formidable diversion made by the Germans at Verdun, in spite of the Austrian dash into the Trentino and the preventive offensive of the Bulgarians in Macedonia, all the Allies, in full accord, during the summer of 1916 engaged in a general attack whose plan had been drawn up in the month of December, 1915, at the Chantilly Conference.

It is to the recital of this combined effort—in which my part was not insignificant—that I wish to consecrate these last chapters of my memoirs.

I have good reason to believe that my rôle in co-ordinating the action of the Allied forces—a rôle I was enabled to exercise thanks solely to the consent of the Commanders-in-Chief of the Coalition—is not generally known. Without trying to prove that we achieved the maximum of results, I feel justified in saying that I accomplished everything which lay in my power, if it be remembered that no agreement of any kind conferred upon me authority over the Allied Armies. How much of diplomacy, of patience and of persistence was required, is probably not for me to say.

The story which follows will show to the reader the long succession of obstacles, which, forever recurring, continued during the whole of this year to beset the route which I had mapped out. It may serve, perhaps, to enlighten those who, in their impatience to see results corresponding

more fully to their expectations, forgot to take into account the difficulties which never ceased to confront me.

Moreover, if we wish to measure what was accomplished in 1916, a year so fertile in great events, and which—it is my firm conviction—brought us so close to victory, we have only to compare it with what was achieved the following year. For reasons to which I need not here refer, since at that moment my rôle was finished, in the year 1917 our Coalition once more began to disperse its efforts, and in the spring of 1918 a definitive catastrophe was the price we came very near paying for our return to the mistaken policy of 1915, a policy which I had tried so hard to modify.

## CHAPTER I

### THE CHANTILLY CONFERENCE

(December 6, 7, 8, 1915)

*The balance sheet of 1915—The Coalition plan of action for 1916—General Sir Douglas Haig succeeds Field Marshal French—Agreement with the Russians—The Italian Army—the Coalition action in the East—Saving the Servian Army—Roumania—The economic war*

WHEN the autumn of 1915 arrived and the noise of great battles died away, it seemed an appropriate time to draw up a balance sheet showing the situation of the Allies as compared with that of the Central Powers.

In France, the hard campaigns of the summer and autumn had left the French and British armies in imperative need of rest, in order to recuperate their strength and renew their stocks of ammunition.

The Russians, after their long and costly retreat, were in no state to recommence offensive operations until they had effected a complete reorganization.

The Italians were preparing to go into winter quarters. The Servian Army was in the midst of a painful retreat towards the Adriatic, after having been obliged to abandon its artillery and train; the Army of the East, unable to give the Servians any assistance, was falling back in good order upon Salonika; the situation of the Expeditionary Corps at the Dardanelles was such that nothing remained for us to do but to withdraw our forces from this hornet's nest; the British expedition to Mesopotamia had been beaten at Ctesiphon and thrown back upon Kut-el-Amara; in Egypt, other British forces had established themselves behind the Suez Canal to protect it against a coming attack which the Turks were vociferously announcing.

It can thus be seen that the year 1915 was drawing to a close under conditions that brought small comfort to the Allies: our armies had everywhere been either checked or beaten, and they needed to be reorganized before any new effort could be demanded of them.



On the contrary, the enemy appeared to have succeeded in all his undertakings. It is true that the Franco-British offensive had worn him down and at times caused him anxiety as to the security of his lines; but, in general, the Germans had resisted along the whole of the Western front, had gained a large success in Russia, had attracted to themselves a new ally and in the space of a few weeks' time had brought to close a victorious campaign in Serbia. They were safe on all their fronts, and they now had reason to hope that the Austro-German troops, until then engaged in Serbia, could soon be made available for other purposes.

However, if their strategic situation was strong, a close examination showed some signs of weakness.<sup>1</sup> In the first place, the Germans were obliged to call to the colours very old classes, and many men declared unfit for service, in order to maintain their effectives; their Turkish and Austrian allies seemed considerably exhausted, maintaining their efforts only with Germany's assistance. The Bulgarian Army alone had suffered little and presented a serious element of strength.

While the sacrifices we had made and the incontestable numerical superiority we enjoyed had brought us only insignificant results, it was evident that the principal reason for this state of affairs lay in the disconnected fashion in which the Allies had conducted the war—each upon his own front and each according to his own ideas. For example, Great Britain, absorbed by the development of her new levies, had undertaken operations on only a limited scale. These unco-ordinated efforts were doomed to failure in advance.

Such was not the case with the Central Powers. Free to manœuvre with the totality of their resources and to concentrate their whole available strength at favourable points, they had been enabled first to make a prolonged and powerful effort against Russia, then invade Serbia, and finally present a successful resistance to the French offensives.

In this way, during the whole of the first year of the war, the Coalition had greatly suffered from the lack of general co-ordination; it had been constantly obliged to bow to the will of the adversary, without being able to oppose to his repeated initiatives anything better than belated

<sup>1</sup> At the end of September three agents empowered by the German Government had endeavoured to present overtures of peace to the French Government:

M. Bokitchevitch, a Servian diplomat, dismissed by M. Pachitch, had arrived from Berlin and asked for an interview with M. Jules Cambon, who had shown him the door.

An Austrian journalist, M. Lippcher, had approached M. Caillaux.

Count Andrássy, a Hungarian statesman, had offered his services to undertake negotiations.

parries. Therefore, the first step to be taken consisted in drawing up a common plan of action which would make it possible for the Allies to impose their will on the Central Powers. This appeared all the more pressing, as it was during the course of these autumn months that profound divergencies of view had manifested themselves, more especially in regard to the Orient.

It was for these reasons that during the early part of November, 1915, I decided to bring about a second Inter-Allied Conference, with the object of arriving at a united plan for our operations. To make it possible to proceed in proper order, it was first necessary to examine the situation and estimate the resources of each Allied Power, so as to determine what effort each could furnish.

Of all the Entente States, France had furnished the most considerable military effort. She had sent to the war 97 active infantry divisions and the equivalent of 37 territorial divisions; from the very start she had poured out all she had without counting the cost, and she now began to reach the limit of her resources in men, while the diminution which her effectives would suffer during the course of 1916 already stared her in the face. France needed a period of rest if she was to bring to new offensives renewed strength and increased material resources.

Great Britain had made magnificent military efforts, but she had not yet put into the balance the maximum of her power. In the present state of her military legislation, she found some difficulty in maintaining the strength of her 70 divisions, and she was backward in the production of needed war material. Nevertheless, by reason of the abundance of her resources and the relative paucity of her losses, it seemed only natural that she should be urged to intensify her efforts.

Russia was suffering above all from lack of proper war material. To give an example, more than a million rifles were needed to bring her 128 divisions up to war strength; her larger units were short in aircraft and heavy artillery; the stock of ammunition was very low. It was, therefore, not possible to expect an active rôle from the Russian Army until time had been given to reconstitute it in these respects; how long it would take for this operation remained to be determined.

The Italian Army, having entered the struggle late, had suffered little. It had only 36 divisions at the front, and abundant resources in men remained available; but its heavy artillery was most inadequate. It, therefore, seemed justifiable to ask that the Italians should make an effort proportionate to the means at their disposal, account being taken of the

special difficulties which their theatre of operations presented during the winter season.

The Servian Army had to be entirely reconstructed and nothing could be expected of it for several months; indeed, for a long period, this force was destined to remain at the entire charge of the Coalition.

Turning now to our principal enemy, Germany, it was not difficult to see the object she had in view. First of all, she was trying to hold out for as long a time and at the least cost possible, and delay as much as she could the exhaustion of her own resources, by using those of her new allies and by an intensive employment of those she still possessed herself; she manifestly was also seeking to disperse the efforts of the Coalition by menacing distant theatres, while at the same time striving to realize her imperial dream symbolized in the slogan, *Drang nach Osten*.

To counter these plans, it seemed to me that the Coalition should bend every effort to the accomplishment of two objects—the destruction of the German and Austrian armies and the annihilation of her plans in the East.

To attain our principal objective, which was the overthrow of the armies of the Central Powers, it would doubtless be necessary to resume a general offensive on all the fronts, Franco-British, Italian and Russian, but this action could not have its full effect unless all the offensives on all the fronts were closely co-ordinated. If this simultaneousness could be realized, and if the effort made by each Ally was characterized by an inflexible will to win, there was reason to anticipate that, attacked everywhere at the same time, the enemy would find it impossible to bring into play the mass of his reserves by utilizing the interior lines he had at his disposal.

But to facilitate the success of this general offensive, which, in any case, it seemed impossible to commence for several months, it appeared essential to continue without interruption a wearing-down process. This would have to be the task of those Powers which had suffered the least and which still had at their disposal considerable resources in men—in other words, Great Britain, Italy and Russia.

Again, in order to give to the general offensive a requisite intensity, it must be preceded by a material preparation carried to the highest point possible in each Allied army during the period of relative inactivity which would precede the combined attack; more especially, Russia must be furnished with the war material which she lacked.

In regard to the secondary objective, that of defeating Germany's

projects in the East and her attempts at diversion, it seemed to me that the best way of achieving this end was for the Coalition to maintain its position at Salonika, while at the same time making sure of the defence of Egypt. By maintaining our hold in the Balkans, we would be able to profit by the uncertain political conditions obtaining in this region, we would conserve to ourselves the possibility of obtaining new help, and in any case we would be in a position to prevent States which were still useful from yielding to German pressure. By gathering together the remnants of the Servian Army and re-organizing them, we would diminish the moral effect of the repulses we had met with at the Dardanelles and in southern Servia.

I considered that the best way of ensuring the immediate defence of Egypt was by the progressive evacuation of the Dardanelles, where no further military advantage could be hoped for, and the transfer to Egypt of the British contingents withdrawn from the Gallipoli peninsula; as regards the secondary theatres of Mesopotamia, the Caucasus and various Colonies, I considered that the most severe economy was indicated.

In addition to all this, the economic war should be organized and intensely pursued, thus placing the Central Powers in the situation of a besieged fortress.

What I have said above constitutes the outline of the plan I intended to submit for the consideration of the representatives of the Allied Armies early in December.

However, on November 22nd, I received from General Alexeieff a vast plan of operations, which he had likewise communicated to the other Commanders-in-Chief. He had in view a general action to be undertaken in the Balkans simultaneously—by the French, English and Italians, starting from Servia and Albania, and by the Russians attacking in Galicia and Bukovina, the common point of direction being Budapest. General Alexeieff based his proposition upon the difficulty of breaking through the fortified lines now established on the two fronts, whereas in the direction of Hungary the enemy appeared less well prepared to receive our attacks.

I studied this plan and very quickly came to the conclusion that it was wholly impracticable by reason more especially of the impossibility for us to transport, supply and manœuvre Franco-Anglo-Italian army corps in the Balkans—a force of 800,000 men—which had been set down as the strength necessary to achieve the numerical superiority necessary for a manœuvre of such magnitude.

The British and Italian Commanders-in-Chief reached the same con-

clusion, and Alexieff's proposal was set aside by common accord; nevertheless, it came up again in the course of the Chantilly Conference.<sup>2</sup>

On December 6th, 7th and 8th, three consecutive meetings were held at my headquarters between the representatives of the Allied Armies. Those present were Marshal French, Lieutenant-General Murray, Chief of the British Imperial General Staff, General Gilinsky, Chief of the Russian Military Mission at French G.H.Q., General Porro, Assistant Chief of the General Staff of the Italian Army, General Wielemans, Chief of the General Staff of the Belgian Army and Colonel Stéphanovitch, Servian Military Attaché. During these three meetings all of our problems were thoroughly studied, resulting in the unanimous acceptance of my plan, with this sole exception: that the principle of the retention of our forces at Salonika was contested by the British representatives; however, the conferees later on unanimously affirmed the necessity of establishing ourselves defensively at Salonika and of immediately beginning the necessary fortifications. It is true that in the view of the British this work should have no other object than to cover the re-embarkation of the Expeditionary Corps.

The outcome of these conversations was the drawing up of a document which constituted the charter of the Coalition during the winter of 1915-16 and the summer campaign of 1916.

It was agreed upon that a decisive result should be sought through co-ordinated offensives on the three fronts, Russian, Franco-British and Italian.

These offensives were to be launched simultaneously, or at least on dates sufficiently near each other to prevent the enemy from moving his reserves from one front to another.

The general action would be begun as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, various considerations made it impossible to fix upon a definite date<sup>3</sup> for starting the offensive—climatic conditions, the enemy situation, progress realized in various munitions programmes, etc.

The Russians could not be ready before the month of June; it was,

<sup>2</sup> After the Chantilly Conference had closed, I received on December 23rd, through General Pau, chief of our Military Mission at Russian G.H.Q., a reply to the objections I had offered to General Alexieff's plan. To this I answered by pointing out that the operation found no place in the decision arrived at by the Conference which had just closed; that it was impossible of execution for reasons of transport, terrain, and supply; that, moreover, it did not appear opportune, since the enemy forces could be more rapidly concentrated upon this eccentric theatre than could our own. The Russian High Command insisted no further and contented itself with carrying out, during the winter, in the region of Cernowitz and Tarnopol a local offensive, which adverse climatic conditions very seriously hampered.

<sup>3</sup> As will be seen further on, in July, 1915, the date of January, 1916, was decided upon for beginning the general offensive.

therefore, decided that the preparatory action would begin then. If, before this date the enemy attacked one of the Allied Powers, the armies of the others would bring to it every assistance that lay in their power.

#### THE CHANGE IN THE COMMAND OF THE BRITISH ARMY

During the Conference, Field Marshal Sir John French and General Murray, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had made emphatic reservations in respect of the maintenance of our forces at Salonika; they had, moreover, insisted that any plan of action would have to be submitted to the British Government. In this way, the result of the Conference, as far as it concerned the French front, could only be considered as a first step; no definite engagements had been taken.

After the close of the Conference on December 8th, Sir John French informed me, in the course of a personal conversation, that he had offered his resignation as Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in France. There was nothing for me to do except to express to him my profound regret at this step, which meant the loss of a loyal comrade-in-arms; but I could not conceal from myself that this change in command would doubtless delay the agreement which still had to be effected with our Allies on the French front.

In addition to this, I learned shortly afterwards that General Wilson, who had been the direct agent of communication between Sir John French and myself and whose personal action combined with his ability had so much contributed to settle every difficulty as it arose, had considered it his duty to resign his post. This he had done in a letter to the Field Marshal.

In spite of the regret he felt at this step, General Wilson, animated by scruples which did him honour, considered it necessary, in order that the future Commander-in-Chief of the British Army might be entirely free either to suppress this post, if he thought it necessary, or to assign to it another officer, if he judged that preferable.

Two men were especially mentioned as Sir John French's successor: Sir Douglas Haig, commanding the First Army, and General Robertson, Chief of the Staff.

As a matter of fact, it was only towards the middle of December that the Field Marshal's resignation became official, and a few days afterwards I learned that General Haig had succeeded to the command, whilst General Robertson was appointed Chief of the General Staff.

On the 20th of December, French came to say good-bye to me, and it was with considerable emotion that I saw him leave. He had been my

comrade in the darkest hours of the war, and I could never forget with what loyalty he had carried out everything that he had promised. I had a battalion of *Zouaves* drawn up and I gave him our Croix de Guerre.

Two days later, General Haig came to see me. I had known him before the war, and during the days following August, 1914, I had learned to appreciate his military talents. He assured me that he would do everything in his power to make our relations as friendly as possible. This first interview left upon me a most favourable impression, and in order to lose no time I invited him to be present at a conference I had called for December 29th to discuss the attitude to be maintained on our front. The President of the Republic, the Minister of War, and the commanders of groups of armies were to be present.

So far as concerned our own front, I already had in view certain arrangements which would enable our Army to pass the winter in defensive positions which would protect them from the danger of a sudden attack. The measures which seemed to me the most appropriate for accomplishing this result consisted in withdrawing troops from the front and augmenting our reserves, while sending back as many units as possible for further training. I had also decided to place the staff of the Second Army in reserve, and to assign to its commander, General Pétain, the duty of preparing the reserves for the execution of the offensives contemplated by the Chantilly Conference. By posting our reserves behind the most sensitive points of the line, I thought that we would be safe from any sudden assaults of the enemy.

These were the ideas which at Chantilly on December 29th I laid before General Haig and the members of the Government, some of whom had become disturbed by various rumours of enemy offensives. I took occasion to explain that in my opinion the British Army had too great a density of troops along its front and too few reserves. This arrangement was dangerous, in the event of an enemy attack, and it also encouraged our Allies in refusing to relieve that part of our Tenth Army lying south-west of Arras, as it seemed logical to us that they should do, in view of the respective strength of our forces. During the conference, General Haig undertook to study this question and to improve in every possible way his defensive system.

I took advantage of the change in command of the British Army to re-organize and strengthen the military mission which, since the opening of hostilities had assured our liaison with our British Allies. In December, 1915, Colonel des Vallières was placed at its head, and I wish to pay tribute here to the conscientiousness, the intelligence and the tact with

which he fulfilled this delicate duty. He was a most useful instrument in effecting the collaboration of the French and British on the Western front, and his heroic death, on May 28, 1918, at the head of the 151st Infantry Division, deprived France of one of her future great commanders. I placed under his direct authority the French officers assigned to the headquarters of the three British armies; up to this time these officers had been under the orders of the generals commanding the neighbouring French armies; the modification rendered the General des Vallières' task much less difficult.

Although our armies were now ordered to assume a defensive attitude, it was essential for them during this period to prepare for the execution of the offensive operations I had in view. I, therefore, gave instructions to the various groups of armies to draw up plans of attack for their respective fronts, from which I would in due time make a choice. I directed that the nature of the operation to be kept in view would be an attack along a wide front of the enemy's first position, with the idea of immediately passing to the attack of his second position.<sup>4</sup> At the same time I requested General Haig to be kind enough to make a study of an action by the British Army between the Somme and Arras, with the object of thereby extending the front of attack anticipated for the Group of Armies of the North between the Somme and Lassigny, and to inform me of what, in his opinion, could be expected from an operation of this nature.<sup>5</sup>

It was not until February 14, 1916, that a definite agreement was arrived at between the British Commander-in-Chief and myself concerning the principle of a contiguous attack to be made at the same time as our own, which was to be delivered on both banks of the Somme towards the end of June; or, in case Russia found herself menaced by a powerful offensive, in the month of April.

As a matter of fact, these negotiations proved quite long, for the British Staff preferred a wide offensive, which it had already studied and to which it attached a very great importance, to be made in the direction of Ostend, with the aid of the Navy and assisted by Belgian and French forces. Nevertheless, General Haig tried most loyally to see my point of view, and if the agreement was long in coming, it was absolute. There was no doubt that the British Army was honestly disposed to make every sacrifice, but, as a very important military personage one day declared to one of our officers, "we have to take into account the

<sup>4</sup> Special and secret instructions of December 15th to generals commanding armies.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to General Haig dated December 26, 1915.



[British] politicians, who, after the Germans, are our worst enemies."<sup>6</sup> The British Government were chagrined at seeing General Haig's plans apparently being subordinated to those of the French Commander-in-Chief, and it hesitated to be drawn into an expenditure of men which public opinion would not readily accept; this state of affairs made it certain that the War Office would have its say in the operations and use its authority to limit the effort which the British armies would furnish in 1916.

Indeed, the War Office had for some time made it evident that its opinion regarding the future development of the war was diametrically opposed to that which had prevailed at the Chantilly Conference. Its desire was to maintain a defensive attitude in France, and to transfer its efforts towards the East and the Colonies. Enlistments, moreover, were falling off, and some of the members of the British Cabinet, rather than face compulsory military service, contemplated reducing Kitchener's programme from 70 divisions to 50.<sup>7</sup>

I was not ignorant of all these difficulties which had to be faced by the British Commander-in-Chief. I kept the French Cabinet informed regarding them, and I endeavoured in every way to bring pressure to bear on the London Government, for if their views had prevailed, the effect upon our projected offensives would have been very serious. The intervention of our Government, added to the efforts of leading British personalities, had its effect. Indeed, as soon as the menace against Egypt disappeared, the movement to France of divisions now no longer required on the Suez Canal was commenced, while at the same time the divisions which had been held in England were brought progressively to the Continent. During the early days of March, 1916, the British Army in France amounted to 42 infantry divisions, as against the 34 which were there two months before; then, in May, 1916, despite a tradition dating back through centuries, compulsory military service was adopted in place of the "Derby Plan," which rested upon voluntary enlistments. Amongst those who did most to bring about this result, special mention should be made of General Robertson, who had been made Chief of the Imperial General Staff in December, 1915. As he and I worked in perfect harmony, we both realized the advantage of a closer communication which was effected by establishing a double liaison in London and at my headquarters. It was maintained by two officers of great ability, Lieutenant-Colonel Clive at Chantilly and Major Bertier de Sauvigny at the War

<sup>6</sup> See Part IV, Chapter III, page 463, *Battle of the Somme*.

<sup>7</sup> *Kitchener et La Guerre*, Chap. XLI, page 283 (Payot, Paris).

Office. I shall have occasion to speak of the latter in connection with Eastern affairs, but I desire to say here how much he contributed to keeping British efforts oriented in a proper direction.

It is thus seen that at the moment when the Battle of Verdun was about to commence, the general plan of a combined Franco-British offensive had been agreed upon. General Foch had been informed that his idea of carrying out the enterprise with 40 divisions and 1200 guns on a front of 30 miles between the Somme and Lassigny, had been approved; the preparatory work was to be conducted in such fashion that the attack could be executed during the month of April, should Russia become seriously menaced; otherwise, on July 1st.

Three French armies were to take part in this offensive. The Second, commanded by General Pétain, was already in reserve behind the Sixth, and the latter was precisely the one which held the front between the Somme and the Oise; the Tenth was to be progressively relieved in the region of Arras by the British, so that it could be put in south of the Somme; the army corps intended for the attack were almost all now in reserve and most of them had spent a period in a camp of instruction. Our stocks of munitions, though much reduced by the battles of September, were being reconstituted.

#### THE AGREEMENT WITH THE RUSSIANS

At the same time that I was making my arrangements with the British for carrying into effect the decisions arrived at during the Chantilly Conference, I was endeavouring to obtain the same results with the Russian High Command.

I must admit that on this side also there was no lack of complications. The poverty in all sorts of war material which prevailed in the Russian Army, and especially the lack of rifles and the difficulty of sending supplies to the Russians, prevented them from making good use of their immense resources in men. This situation caused great anxiety. The Conference had decided that it was essential for the Coalition to come to Russia's aid in the largest measure possible; unfortunately, in these efforts, the Allies were very poorly aided by the Russian representatives in France, who were constantly endeavouring to conceal the truth.

An incident which arose during the Conference will show to what a point this spirit of dissimulation was carried. During the session of December 7th, I had requested the Allied representatives to furnish me with information regarding the situation in their armies. General Gilin-

sky<sup>8</sup> was the first to reply, and he vigorously contested the figures which we knew represented the real strength of the Russian forces.

According to our figures the effectives were not more than a million and a half men, whereas the General contended that they amounted to 2,700,000. The difference was a big one. In order to justify our figures, I offered to read a telegram which I had just received from Petrograd, which was very clear and emphatic on the subject of the Russian strength. The General objected to having this paper read aloud. I, therefore, handed it to him. He glanced over it rapidly and with a gesture of fury stuffed it into his portfolio. The telegram stated that the Russians had 1,360,000 men at the front, of which 160,000 had no rifles. This sharp encounter produced quite a sensation. It was clear that a lack of confidence reigned between the Russian General Staff and ours.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, for some time there had been signs of weariness, or rather of indifference, in Russia in all that concerned the war, for the Russian nature is easily turned aside from its dreams. Nevertheless, the Emperor remained inflexibly loyal to our cause.<sup>10</sup>

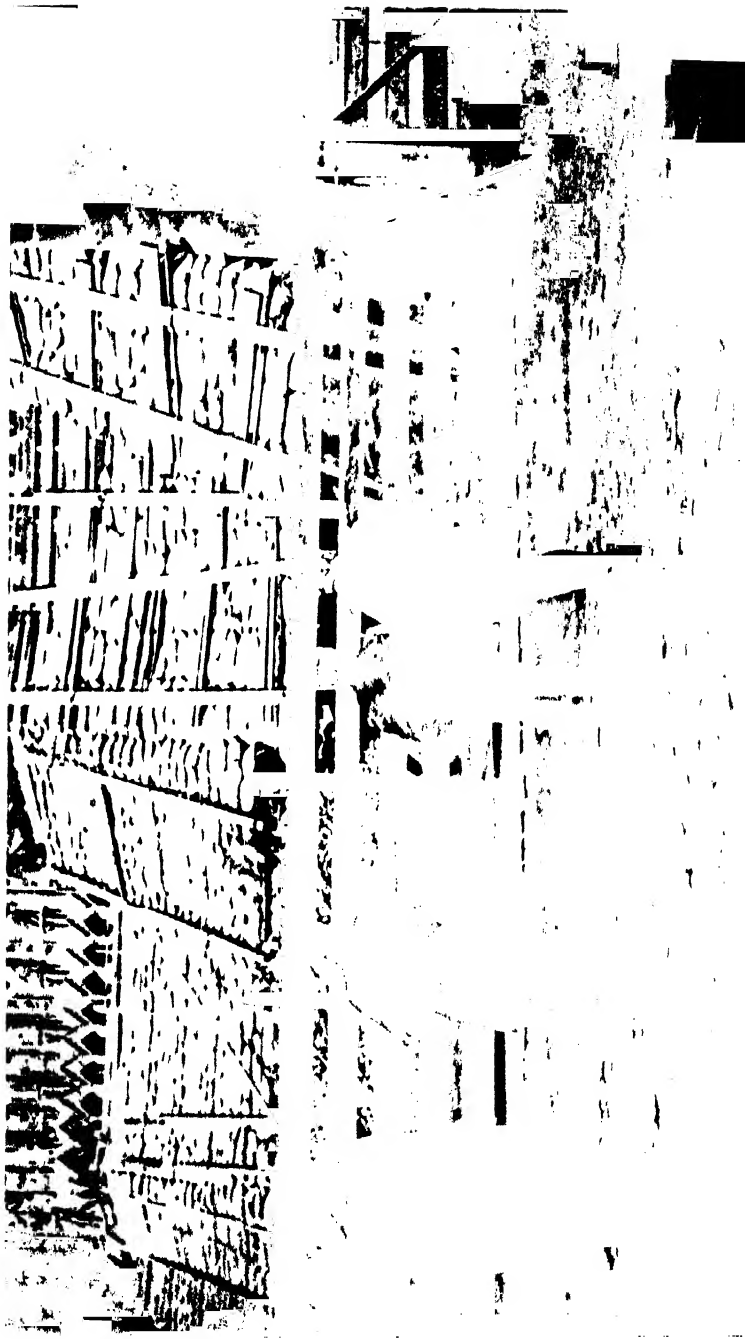
For all of these reasons, I felt doubtful as to the Russians displaying the necessary activity in applying the decisions of the Conference, and this impression was strengthened by something that happened shortly after its close. The Russians had requested me to start an offensive against the Germans for the purpose of relieving the pressure on their front. I discussed this subject with General Gilinsky during the latter half of December and I explained to him how impossible it was for me to accede to this suggestion, in view of all the efforts which had been furnished by the French Army in 1915. I pointed out to him that most of the weight of the war had fallen on France, on whose soil was concentrated the main strength of the German Army, and I added that in comparison with the French front, the Eastern line had been largely stripped of enemy troops.

About this same time most trustworthy information reached me describing "the frightful disorder which reigned in the Russian communications"; Lord Kitchener had drawn my attention to the same point. Traffic in the northern ports was apparently interrupted for the whole duration of the winter; the railways in course of construction in the

<sup>8</sup> General Gilinsky, whom I had known at Petrograd when he was Chief of the General Staff, gave me the impression of being neither very able nor very frank. He was bound in closest intimacy to General Soukoumlinoff, the Minister of War—and everybody now knows the details of the latter's disgraceful conduct when he was in power.

<sup>9</sup> *Le Flambeau* of July 31, 1924. Correspondence between Gilinsky and General Daniloff, Quartermaster-General of the Grand Duke Nicholas.

<sup>10</sup> Telegram from M. Paléologue, French Ambassador to Russia, dated December 27, 1915.



GENERAL JOFFRE AND GENERAL FRANCHET D'ESPÈREY OUTSIDE RHEIMS CATHEDRAL

February 17th 1916



region of the White Sea were far from being finished, and under the conditions it seemed extremely dangerous to continue to send war material to the northern ports. Through lack of elementary facilities, supplies arriving could neither be disembarked nor stored, while there was risk of their being entirely lost during the course of a hazardous voyage across the polar sea or during interminable journeys on sleds.

The question was fast becoming one of grave concern; in an effort to remedy it, I first thought of sending to Russia a special mission composed of French officers and engineers, who would organize the traffic on the Russian railway lines, following the system pursued in our own country. But this proposal ran counter to Russian susceptibilities, which caused its rejection. I then proposed to the Prime Minister that Japan should be induced to furnish additional material, and that a line of supply should be opened by way of Canada and Siberia. Objection was made that the Trans-Siberian railway was already taxed beyond its capacity; so these suggestions also fell to the ground.<sup>11</sup>

However, stimulated at last by necessity, the Russians pushed the construction of their railways to the White Sea, and a sled service was organized, making it possible to transport during the bad season a very considerable part of the material furnished by the Allies.

The Russian problem was also taken up by the Government, which endeavoured to see by what means it would be possible for us to utilize Russia's immense resources in men. For the question of effectives on the French front had become disturbing, and it was clear that if a German attack should take place there we would be very shortly obliged to embody the 1916 class in our fighting units. This was the origin of the ingenious idea which arose in official spheres of asking Russia, whose lack of armament prevented her from using a large part of her men, to send to the French front organized contingents, estimated as high as 40,000 a month. The arms and equipment of these units would be furnished by us. To carry out this plan, the Government, during the first fortnight of December, sent to Russia a delegation, headed by M. Doumer and to which I assigned General Pau, who on December 4th had been designated as Chief of the French Mission at Russia G.H.Q.

M. Doumer's mission was only partially successful. In fact, the Russian Government objected to sending to France 40,000 men a month, under pretext that its trained reserves were not sufficient. However, by way of experiment it agreed to send a Russian brigade, which was embarked between February 29th and March 17th at Dalny. This was to be followed

<sup>11</sup> Letters to the Prime Minister dated December 24, 1915, and January 3, 1916.

later on by five other brigades, whose departure was to take place during 1916 at such time as the northern ports were practicable. Reduced to these proportions, the matter no longer presented a serious interest for the solution of the crisis in effectives on the French front.<sup>12</sup>

It was natural to suppose that the prestige and reputation which attached to the person of that fine soldier, General Pau, would aid in bringing the two staffs together. Unfortunately, such was not the case; at the Stavka<sup>13</sup> our officers were politely ignored and they found it most difficult to learn what plans the Russian High Command had in view. Indeed, weariness and indifference began to make their appearance in many directions, and, as far as Russia was concerned, we were destined from now on to have nothing but disillusion.

#### THE AGREEMENT WITH ITALY

At the Chantilly Conference, General Porro, Assistant Chief of the Italian General Staff, let it be understood that, thanks to a new draft which had been made in November, the Italian Army would soon be reinforced by a considerable number of new units: 12 brigades of infantry, 2 regiments of Bersaglieri, 26 Alpine batteries, 74 field and mountain batteries, 150 siege batteries and 74 companies of engineers. Unfortunately, and without doubt due to budgetary reasons, the Italian Government found itself obliged to reduce its programme by about one-half; and when, in February, 1916, the French Prime Minister went to Italy, accompanied by General Pellé, the latter was urged by General Cadorna to make a contribution to the armament of the new units and to the constitution of the additional heavy batteries. When this request was communicated to me, I wrote, on February 22nd, to the Minister of War, that as far as I was concerned I thought we could accede to Italy's desire. My idea was, in fact, that we should avoid giving Italy any pretext for failing to take a less important share in the offensive than had been agreed upon at the Chantilly Conference.

#### THE ACTION OF THE COALITION IN THE NEAR EAST

At the beginning of December, 1915, the situation in the Near East was far from promising. The Army of the East was retiring upon Salonika, where no fortified positions had as yet been constructed to receive it; the Servian Army, thrown back into the mountains, was there engaged in a

<sup>12</sup> The 2nd and 3rd Russian brigades were later sent to Salonika; and the three others never started.

<sup>13</sup> The Russian term for Russian G.H.Q.—Translator.

painful retreat; the Expeditionary Corps at the Dardanelles was hopelessly clinging to its perilous positions around Gallipoli; Greece was showing a most suspicious attitude, and had even put forth the pretension of disarming our soldiers the moment they crossed the Greek frontier in their retirement from Servia. Greece was also more or less openly opposing the construction of fortifications around Salonika and Roumania had absolutely refused Russia's suggestions to give free passage to Russian forces either across her territory or down the Danube.

Furthermore, as regards the line of conduct to be pursued in the East, there existed no agreement amongst the Entente, and the Conferees at Chantilly had not succeeded in reaching an accord on that subject. It was most urgently necessary that the chaotic attempts which, up to this time, had characterized the policy of the Entente in the Near East should be co-ordinated in a manner conforming to its common interests. The Russian and Italian Governments were in agreement with us on this point.

The first thing to do was to come to some decision as to the principle of maintaining our forces in Salonika. M. Briand, who succeeded M. Viviani as Prime Minister towards the end of October, 1915, was an ardent advocate of the Salonika expedition; in fact, he had urged it ever since the beginning of 1915. On the contrary, M. Clemenceau had always strenuously opposed, both in Parliament and in the press, any operation in this region.<sup>14</sup>

I spent October 29th and 30th in London, endeavouring to convince Lord Kitchener of the necessity of remaining in Salonika in order to save the Servian Army. My representations were most energetic and I succeeded in obtaining from the British Cabinet the promise of their co-operation in opening and maintaining railway communication between Salonika and Uskub. Altogether, the matter seemed in fair way of being settled, and Kitchener himself, on November 6th, embarked for the Near East, with the intention of personally examining whether the matter was possible. On his way through Paris he made a visit to M. Briand, who used all the power of his persuasion to convince him. He also came to Chantilly, but I saw that he continued to believe that our action at Salonika would be too late to make it possible to save Servia, and that he was still haunted by the thought of Egypt.

As to the Dardanelles, his opinion was expressed in the following

<sup>14</sup> I had occasion to see this for myself during a visit that I made to him on November 29, 1915.



words: "If we stay at the Dardanelles an attack on Egypt is always possible; if we withdraw, it is certain."

Lord Kitchener returned to London on November 20th, and we gathered that his journey had not induced him to share our point of view. In particular, I was informed by Colonel Girodon, who had accompanied him to the East, that, during a conference at Mudros on November 10th, he had expressed the opinion that the best thing to do was partially to evacuate the Dardanelles, and land four divisions on the Gulf of Alexandria, for the purpose of cutting the Bagdad railway and thus ensuring the distant protection of Egypt. This idea appeared to me dangerous, for it would cause a dispersion of the Coalition's forces and it ran the risk of meeting the same difficulties as the unfortunate Dardanelles expedition had encountered.

It was agreed between the British and French Governments that a conference should take place on December 4th at Calais and that the leading political and military personalities of the two countries would be present. Therefore, on the morning of December 4th I left with General Pellé for that town. Here I found M. Briand, General Gallieni, Minister of War, Admiral Lacaze, Minister of Marine, General Graziani, Chief of the Army General Staff, Admiral Jonquière, Chief of the Navy General Staff, and M. de Margerie, Director of Political and Commercial Affairs at the Foreign Office. Representing the British were Mr. Asquith, the Prime Minister, Mr. Balfour, Secretary of State for War, General Sir Archibald Murray, Chief of the Imperial General Staff of the British Army, and Mr. Clark of the Foreign Office.

The Conference was a long one; opening at 2.30 p.m., it did not close until 6 o'clock. Lord Kitchener and M. Briand set forth in turn their points of view. Kitchener maintained that since the Servians were incapable of continuing the struggle, the Allied troops should be withdrawn from the region menaced by the advance of the Austrians, Germans and Bulgarians, so that they could be more profitably employed elsewhere.

M. Briand defended the French point of view with the greatest warmth. He represented that while we had gone into the Balkans to rescue the Servians, it was also true that we had done so to prevent the Germans from becoming the masters of that region, and to restrain Greece and Roumania; that at least 110,000 Servian soldiers could be rescued and re-formed into an army; that from a moral point of view the effect of their abandonment would be disastrous. Moreover, Russia, in response to representations from the French and British Cabinets, had finally concentrated some 400,000 men in her territories lying closest to

the Balkans, and Italy had agreed to intervene in Albania; it was also to be feared that if the Allies abandoned Serbia, her politicians of the Liberal party, who had always been in favour of coming to an agreement with Austria, would take advantage of the opportunity and treat with the enemy. M. Briand ended by pointing out that along a line running from the Vardar up to the Chalcidian Marshes the Allied troops could most certainly defend themselves against all attempts on the part of the enemy.

Nothing availed. The British were unyielding. They continued to maintain that to keep the Expeditionary Corps at Salonika was both useless and dangerous. The most they would agree to do was not to demand immediate evacuation, but they expected that the decision to depart would be taken at a very early date. It has been seen that during the Chantilly Conference the British representatives defended this same point of view, and orders to stop the disembarkation of material at Salonika had already been sent from London.

However, on December 5th, during an interview with M. Guillemin, our Minister at Athens, the King of Greece had given his word that his army would never attack our troops; moreover, he consented to the defensive organization of Salonika. This favourable news had an immediate and happy effect upon the British Government, which showed itself much more amenable. In fact, four days later, Lord Kitchener, accompanied by Sir Edward Grey, arrived in Paris, bringing with them the agreement of their Government to the maintenance, at least provisionally, of the Expeditionary Corps at Salonika and its establishment behind a fortified position.

This rapid change of attitude is another evidence of British loyalty; starting from this moment, the principle of maintaining our forces at Salonika was never again seriously brought into question. It is true that during the conferences of January 22nd and February 14th of the following year, the British Government once more endeavoured to open a discussion regarding the more or less complete evacuation of the place, but it did not insist on this, and from that time on simply confined itself to refusing any increase of the British contingent.

As soon as the agreement of December 9th gave me the assurance that the British would remain with us at Salonika, I gave orders to General Sarrail, who a few days before, by the decree of December 2nd, had been placed under my authority, immediately to commence the works of defence; at the same time I informed him that an important shipment of heavy artillery and engineering material was being prepared. But I

have to admit that as soon as the Salonika front was placed directly under my orders, I felt the need of obtaining by detailed examination on the spot exact information as to the conditions surrounding the problem in the East. I more particularly desired to know with accuracy the capacity of resistance of the 150,000 men composing the army when once installed in positions around Salonika.

Now, in order to carry out the decree of December 2nd, I found it necessary to effect a new organization of my staff. More especially I was led to appoint a chief staff officer, a sort of collaborator of very high rank, whose duty it would be to fulfil important missions which I might desire to confide to him. With the approval of the Minister of War, I had designated General de Castelnau for this position and my first thought was to assign to him this investigation in the East, so that he could study conditions on the spot. On December 10th, I went to Avize, the headquarters of Castelnau, who then commanded the Group of Armies of the Centre, to inform him of his nomination<sup>15</sup> and explain what I desired him to do.

Castelnau left on December 15th.<sup>16</sup> On arriving at Salonika he examined and approved Sarraill's plan for putting the place in a state of defence. The opinion he formed was that it would be entirely possible for the forces we had in view for service in the East to resist any attack which the Germans and Bulgarians could make against them.

To sum up, while the Entente had failed in its efforts to save the Servian Army, the arrangements just concluded would provide a first-class point of support for our further operations in the Balkans, by the establishment of an intact army in favourable positions which would be constantly improved.

However, two dangers presented themselves and care would have to be taken not to fall into either. On the one hand, it was essential that the Army of the East should present an element of force sufficiently menacing to hamper the plans of our enemies and inspire confidence in hesitating neutrals; on the other hand, it was important to avoid dissipating, for the benefit of a distant and secondary theatre, forces which could better be employed at the point where the ultimate decision must

<sup>15</sup> In the French service, when a large army takes the field, the man at the head of the Commander-in-Chief's staff is designated "*The Major-General*." His functions correspond to those which in the American and British services fall to the chief of staff. General Joffre thus appointed General de Castelnau as chief staff officer, he already had appointed a *Major-General*.

<sup>16</sup> At this moment, I learned that the retreat of our forces towards the Greek frontier had been effected in good order and that all of the matériel and supplies stored in Servia had been saved. I was happy to congratulate General Sarraill upon this success.

be sought. Therefore, the army at Salonika had to be sufficiently numerous, well organized, well commanded, and provided with a sufficiently powerful matériel to enable it to fulfil the rôle which had been laid down for it during the Chantilly Conference.

These were the considerations which induced me to approve all the requests for war material sent forward by General Sarrail, especially those for heavy artillery, and to attempt to persuade the British Government to have all the forces at Salonika put under the command of one man. Before agreeing to this suggestion, the British at first exacted that both General Sarrail and General Mahon should be placed under the orders of a French General who would be especially designated for the post.<sup>17</sup>

However, upon the insistence of our Government, the British, towards the end of December, agreed that General Sarrail should be given the command.

But the requests which Sarrail now sent me were not confined to war matériel, and he announced that 150,000 men were not sufficient to assure the defence of Salonika. It was to clear up this point that I sent General de Castelnau to the East, and his conclusions were to the effect that once the units designated for its composition were on hand the Army of the East could defend Salonika under excellent conditions.

Therefore, when at the end of December, and again in January, I received a request from General Sarrail for two divisions, I was obliged to send him a formal refusal, at the same time pointing out that as soon as the re-organization of the Servian Army was sufficiently advanced, its best elements would be directed upon Salonika. I even had to embark on a struggle over this matter with the French Government, to whom General Sarrail had made a direct appeal, in order to prevent the hur-

<sup>17</sup> On December 27th the British Cabinet deliberated on the question of a single command for the Allied forces at Salonika, and it was decided that their reply would be sent on the 28th to the French Government through the British Ambassador in Paris.

The following is an extract from a letter addressed on December 29, 1915, by Colonel de la Panouse, French Military Attaché in London, to the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies:

"According to what Lord Kitchener told me, the Cabinet agree that the British troops, although they are the more numerous, shall be placed under the orders of a French general; but in their opinion, since General Mahon has been for quite a long time independent of General Sarrail, it is preferable not to place him under the orders of the latter. Such a step might be considered as constituting a criticism of the way the operations have been conducted up to this time by the British, and would result in the belittling of General Mahon's moral authority.

The British Government would, therefore, be very glad if the French Government would appoint an officer having higher rank than either of the two generals who now command at Salonika; in this way the latter would preserve their relative equality."

(Strictly Personal File of the Commander-in-Chief,  
Volume II, Folder 3, Document 41.)

ried despatch to his army of Brulard's division, concentrated at Mitylene. Foreseeing the danger presented by this method of bringing pressure to bear upon my decisions, I decided to write to the Minister of War and assert my full responsibility in all that concerned the defence of Salonika. "I request," I wrote on January 22, 1916, "that not only in France but in the East, I should be left entire freedom to assign our forces and choose the means and designate the method of their employment, as being the only way that will enable me properly to direct military operations in accordance with the intentions of the Government."

### THE SERVIANS

The rescue of the remaining fragments of the Servian Army became one of my most serious preoccupations from the moment I was given command of the French armies on all the theatres of the war.

Our Allies had made their retreat under conditions which surpassed in tragedy anything that history has ever recorded. Camping in the snow and harassed by a hostile population, before they reached the mountains they had abandoned the whole of their wheeled transport and almost all their artillery. Nevertheless, the remnants, exhausted, famished, and in rags, had reached the region bordering on the Adriatic, where, during the early days of December, they formed two disorganized masses, one around Scutari-Saint-Jean-de-Medua, the other around Elbasan-Tirana.

The problem now presented was to feed and clothe these pitiful survivors and eventually re-form them into an army, thus placing at the disposal of the Coalition a few units possessing the excellent qualities inherent in the Servian race.<sup>18</sup> The French Government had sent a mission to Italy which, working in conjunction with the British Adriatic Mission, managed to land provisions at Saint-Jean-de-Medua and Durazzo; but the presence of enemy ships in the Adriatic Sea still rendered it difficult to forward supplies, and it was only possible to get enough rations to the Servians to prevent them from dying of hunger. It, therefore, became indispensable to transport the various detachments to some region less exposed than was the Albanian coast—for example, to Valona. I decided to send General Piarron de Mondésir to Brindisi, with instructions to take in hand the rescue of the Servian Army and then reorganize it.

On December 15th he left for Italy; but here he met with opposition from the Italian Government, which would not hear of the concentra-

<sup>18</sup> On November 11th Prince Alexander sent me a telegram to thank me for my efforts with the Inter-Allied Council in behalf of Servia. In it he declared that "our soldiers are eager to take the field and once more fight for our common interests alongside their noble allies, whose skill and courage are legendary."

tion of the Servians in the region of Valona. The pretext officially given was that they would certainly bring the seeds of epidemics with them; the real reason, however, lay in the fact that Italy had no desire to see the Servians install themselves in a region which she now looked upon as her own private "hunting ground."

Another solution, therefore, had to be found, and this was all the more urgent since the condition of the Servian troops became every day more critical. Indeed, on the 20th of December, I received a touching appeal from Prince Alexander in which he pointed out that his starved and demoralized troops were now menaced by Austrian and Bulgarian contingents which were moving towards the Adriatic between Alessio and Durazzo.

As soon as I received this news, I hastened to urge upon the Prime Minister the necessity of bringing diplomatic pressure to bear upon the Italian Government in order to obtain its authority for us to use Valona, at least as the first stopping place. In case Italian opposition could not be entirely overcome, "the next best solution," I added, "appeared to consist in immediately transporting the Servian forces from Scutari to the Island of Corfu." I also asked the Naval Authorities whether this operation was possible from a naval point of view, and whether it could be executed with the rapidity which the circumstances required.<sup>19</sup>

I was waiting impatiently for a reply to these suggestions when, on December 26th, I learned with astonishment that the French Government had decided to transport the Servian Army to Bizerta. This solution, unexpected to say the least, seemed to entail many objections, the principal one being that this operation would necessitate the employment of ships and naval equipment required for transporting to Salonika supplies of which the Army of the East stood in immediate need. I, therefore, urged upon M. Briand the Corfu solution, which was far simpler and more rapid; I also pointed out to him that the occupation of this island would prevent its being used as a base for German submarines and a centre for German agitation and propaganda. Moreover, according to M. Guillemin, our Minister at Athens, we need not fear any serious opposition on the part of Greece, that country being, after all, Servia's lawful ally.

On January 2, 1916, I went to the Quai d'Orsay to plead this cause, and on the 6th I learned that the Government had finally adopted my point of view. On January 7th, orders were given to a group of Alpine battalions to establish themselves at Corfu, which was done without diffi-

<sup>19</sup> Message telephoned at 10.45 a.m., December 22, 1915, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

culty. There then remained the question of transport. I pointed out to the Council of National Defence, which held a meeting on January 12th, how serious a danger would be involved for the Servians at Scutari if Mount Lovćen was taken by the Austrians; and as time was being wasted in discussion between the French and Italian Governments, in order to hasten the solution, I proposed that we should adopt the Italian proposition which consisted in embarking at Valona those Servians who were capable of reaching that place on foot, and at Saint-Jean-de-Medua and Durazzo all men unable to march farther. On January 16th I was finally able to give General Mondésir orders to proceed to Albania and personally direct the evacuation.

The French Navy, now efficiently aided by the Italian Naval Authorities, went to work energetically and enthusiastically. By the 19th of February, the last men had reached Corfu but the last of the animals only on April 5th. It had been possible to save 160,000 men and 10,000 animals; but all were in a lamentable condition. General de Mondésir's task was now to re-organize these remnants into an army.

The Army of Montenegro had been definitely struck off the rolls of the Coalition, it having capitulated, for the most part, after the occupation of Scutari by the Austrians, in spite of General Mondésir's efforts during the last days of December to prevent it, and the measures taken to supply the Montenegrins with arms, ammunition and rations.

Events in the East now made it necessary for us to consider measures for the safety of our Expeditionary Corps. The attitude of Greece, at first favourable to the Entente, had lately become more and more suspicious, following upon the resignation of M. Venizelos at the beginning of December; this hostility had manifested itself so plainly that, on the 16th, France suggested to the Governments of the Quadruple Entente that steps be immediately taken to put Greece on a rationing system for all her food supplies. We held under our control all the routes which led to her shores and thus had a singularly powerful means of compulsion, especially if we rationed her in the matter of money as well as of food. For she was no less dependent upon the Allies in this respect, and they could dole out to her by instalments and under due stipulations only the sums required for urgent and proved necessities.

Under the threat of a naval demonstration at the Piræus, Greece finally authorized the construction of fortifications at Salonika and halted the concentration of her forces in the region adjoining that place. However, hardly a day passed, so to speak, that I did not receive from General Sarraill some report describing the unrest reigning at Salonika, the Ger-

manophile sentiment which hampered his actions; and the vast network of espionage which centred in the city, and which, on December 30th, had led him to arrest the Consuls of the enemy Powers. What rendered his task particularly difficult was the desire of the French Government to spare the susceptibilities of Greece, whose active support continued to be considered both "desirable and possible."

After arriving at an understanding with our Government, I was finally able to send Sarraill instructions enabling him to take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of his army at Salonika. Amongst these, he contemplated proclaiming a state of siege the moment that the Bulgarians crossed the frontier, as seemed probable. But a Greek division was in garrison in the town and it could use its wireless telegraph for the purpose of giving the enemy useful information concerning the situation of our forces. Sarraill requested authority to require this division to quit the zone of the entrenched camp within 24 hours after the proclamation of a state of siege. I supported his request with the Prime Minister, who exacted of the Greek Government the necessary guarantees.

These various measures had the effect of assuring, partially at least, the safety of our troops; but, on the other hand, it also became necessary to bring pressure to bear upon General Sarraill to induce him to collaborate with the Greek Government, as was desired by both France and Great Britain. There can be no doubt that this officer, whose army during the whole of the campaign in Servia had suffered from the duplicity of the Greeks, was little inclined to show them any consideration, and he treated them with a degree of roughness entirely natural under the circumstances, refusing them supplies, destroying railway bridges, arresting Consuls, etc. On January 31, 1916, I sent him the following telegram with a view to moderating his severity:

The Government considers that the collaboration of Greece should always be regarded as desirable and possible. It requires that our diplomatic and military action should be effected in such manner as to prepare for and facilitate this collaboration. To carry out this policy you are directed not to undertake—except of course in cases of *force majeure* or lack of time for referring the matter to Paris—any military operation which could be interpreted as infringing on the sovereignty of Greece, except upon formal instructions from the Government.

These directions constituted the basis of our political action in Greece during the whole of the year 1916. Their literal application frequently hampered the action of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the



East but it failed to bring us the collaboration of the Greeks, King Constantine's Government more than once giving evidence of how little it appreciated our patience, which, indeed, it mistook for weakness.

#### ROUMANIA

The question of Roumania's intervention made little progress during the period which preceded the Battle of Verdun. Indeed, after the battle of Tarnov, the Roumanian Government obstinately refused to enter into fresh negotiations with the Entente, and at one time there was even reason to fear that she might range herself on the side of our enemies.

However, at the beginning of 1916, the situation seemed for a moment to change. To prevent Roumania from selling wheat to the Central Powers, France and Great Britain had bought large quantities of cereals from her. These purchases led the German Minister at Bucharest to assume a threatening attitude, which without doubt alarmed M. Bratiano's Government, for it thereupon consulted the Russians as to the help which they would be in position to lend if the German protest should develop into an ultimatum. This seemed a good occasion for inducing Roumania to resist the German demands by promising her armed assistance. I discussed the question with M. Briand in Paris, and on January 28th I directed General Pau to ask General Alexeieff to place as soon as possible in rear of the Russian left wing a strong force of reserves, capable of supporting the Roumanians if necessity arose; at the same time I directed General Sarraill to create uneasiness in the enemy's camp by giving the impression that we were contemplating an early offensive action.

But the difficulty between the Germans and Roumanians soon disappeared. Nevertheless, during the time that negotiations between the Russian and Roumanian staffs were going on, they revealed a profound divergence of views between them, more especially in regard to the nature of the plan of operations. Now, it was most important that Roumania should not turn her eyes towards our enemies, especially when it was remembered that General Alexeieff had declared "if Roumania's assistance is secured by the Germans it will sound the death knell of any Russian offensive";<sup>30</sup> for the plans of the Coalition were based in large measure precisely upon the execution of such an offensive and there could be no doubt that the success of our general attack would be seriously compromised if Russia was forced to observe a defensive attitude.

<sup>30</sup> Telegram from General Pau dated February 25th.

Nevertheless, it was evident that Roumania, surrounded as she was, could not indefinitely maintain her neutrality, and the misunderstanding which had arisen between her and Russia regarding the plan of operation was calculated to compromise the whole situation. The difficulty was that each of the two Powers desired that the other should undertake that part of the military task which it disliked to assume itself. Russia wished to operate in Bukovina, putting upon the Roumanian Army the duty of guarding her frontier on the Danube. Roumania wanted to invade Transylvania, while charging the Russian Army with operations on the southern frontier of the Kingdom. The Russian plan inspired Roumania with an invincible suspicion; the Roumanian plan was distasteful to Russia, tempted as she was to look upon her neighbour as an insignificant vassal Power.<sup>21</sup>

It being essential to reconcile these two points of view at all costs, I asked M. Briand to exert diplomatic influence upon the Russians in the hope of inducing them to manifest an earnest desire for conciliation; I also had the good fortune to succeed in getting the Government to forward munitions manufactured in France to points in southern Russia, there to be stored until Roumania made her decision as to which side she would take. These efforts had given no results when the Battle of Verdun had reached its height, and even then there was no assurance as to what Roumania's decision would be.

#### THE ECONOMIC WAR

During the course of the year 1915, I drew the attention of the Government several times to the necessity of extending the war to the economic domain. The importance of doing so increased as the war dragged on. For, in a struggle which every day assumed more and more the character of a siege, the first condition to be realized was to cut the enemy's communications with other countries, and prevent him, as far as possible, from procuring from outside territory the resources he needed for continuing the war; and yet, it had to be admitted, the first year of the contest was drawing to a close without anything really serious and efficacious having been tried toward accomplishing this end.

On November 22nd, the Minister of Foreign Affairs informed me that, thanks to measures taken in agreement with Great Britain, "neutral commerce was being closely watched and British exports to countries which might supply our enemies had been considerably reduced." But a study of the tables furnished in support of these statements proved that

<sup>21</sup> Letter from General Joffre to the Prime Minister, dated February 29, 1916:

this reduction was still far from being sufficient. In certain articles of merchandise exported from England, there was even noted a considerable increase; the commerce of neutral countries had taken on enormous proportions since the beginning of the war, while France and Italy permitted a quantity of goods to enter Switzerland which far surpassed the economic and industrial needs of that country.

For example, during the month of October, the United Kingdom had exported to northern Europe more than 1000 tons of cotton in excess of the preceding months; the importation into Norway of chrome ore coming from England had increased sixfold during the same month; importations from France or Italy into Switzerland during the first six months of 1915 had doubled for cocoa, increased ten times for vegetable and animal oils, and tripled for cotton. There could be no doubt that neutral countries were serving as storehouses for our adversaries who, through their intermediary, were receiving everything that they needed.

During the course of the Chantilly Conference, I thought it my duty to draw attention to the necessity of effecting a close economic blockade of the Central Powers by *imposing* upon neutral countries a close rationing, strictly corresponding to their needs, with every source of leakage guarded against. The Conference adopted my suggestion and proposed the creation of a central committee charged with drawing up a programme and proposing means for carrying it out.

Evidently, the organization of economic warfare as far as France was concerned was the business of the Government; all I could do was to bring to its attention the grave importance of the question; it was a source of great regret, moreover, that responsibility in this matter was divided among several Ministerial departments, thus making it all the more difficult to fix it and so obtain better results. My rôle, therefore, in this most important question was limited to pointing out the military consequences which would ensue if the measures taken were not sufficiently severe, or if they were put into effect too late. This I did on several occasions. For example, towards the end of December, 1915, I vigorously insisted that France and England should purchase the whole or a part of the Roumanian wheat crop; I likewise endeavoured on several occasions to obtain a strict rationing of Greece, where efforts were being made to escape our economic surveillance.

On the other hand, a very dangerous current of opinion had begun to make itself felt on the subject of economic warfare and some were tempted to believe that victory could be obtained through the mere operation of a severe blockade and without having recourse to military inter-

vention. Nothing could be more false. For while useful results could be obtained by cutting off Germany from sources of outside supply, these measures were bound to be incomplete, however closely the blockade was carried out. Indeed, although it appeared possible to close the lines of supply leading to the north, those coming from the east remained wide open. I, therefore, thought it important to draw the attention of the French Government to this point, in order to arrest the dissemination of so dangerous an idea. This I did at a meeting of the Council of National Defence held on February 2, 1916.

But the question of instituting an economic war soon ceased to occupy me, for towards the end of March, 1916, the Government claimed its entire responsibility in the matter and assumed full charge of the whole question. Nevertheless, I should note here a very delicate point which arose at the beginning of January, regarding the importation of raw materials into Belgium and the exportation from that country of manufactured articles. What influence could these operations have upon Germany's power of resistance? Could they prolong or shorten the term of the war?

Opinions were divided. In general, the British were favourable to authorizing these exchanges, basing their opinion above all on sentimental reasons—the desire to diminish the suffering of the Belgian people, fear that the Germans would take possession of idle plants and employ them, with or without the owners' consent, for their own profit; fear that Belgian workmen, deprived of work, would seek employment in German mines and factories, thus making available additional combatants.

Our point of view was somewhat different. We held that it was essential at any cost to deprive the enemy of all resources which might be useful to him; therefore, from a military point of view, trade with Belgium should be restricted to a carefully studied and specified list of goods. This was the opinion I expressed.

During the time that I was called upon to occupy myself with them, all questions concerning the economic blockade of the Central Powers were dealt with by M. François-Marsal, attached to my headquarters. In this work he gave proof of high intelligence and practical good sense. For example, it was he who called my attention to the importance which the purchase of the Roumanian wheat crop presented for the Entente. I am glad to express my appreciation of the eminent service he rendered on this occasion.

## CHAPTER II

### VERDUN

#### *The German Attacks from February to July, 1916*

WHEN on February 21, 1916, the Germans hurled themselves against Verdun, the attack did not take us unawares, but before going further it is essential to turn back to events leading up to this great battle.

After our offensives in Artois and Champagne, during which all of our available forces had been engaged, it became essential to reconstitute our reserves in men and material. To do this I decided to assume a waiting attitude during the winter, until such time as new operations could be undertaken. At the end of October, therefore, I prescribed that commanders of groups of armies should reduce to a minimum the forces kept in the front line and place in reserve as many units as possible, distributing them behind the front in such fashion as to enable them to be rapidly moved to any threatened point. I calculated that in this way the front could be held with the equivalent of some fifty divisions; 20 others were allotted as reserves for the various groups of armies, and I kept 25 at my own disposal.

The rapid movement of these reserves was to be assured by placing our mechanical transport parks at suitably chosen points, and by creating four trunk-line systems of railway transport, specially devised for this purpose.

I also caused each of the groups of armies to draw up a general plan of works to be executed. On those parts of the front which particularly lent themselves to offensive actions, the ground was to be so organized as to enable the offensive to be taken at any moment, without resorting to long preparatory operations, so that surprise might be effected to the largest extent possible.

Along other portions of the line, on the contrary, it was to our advantage to keep well separated from the enemy, so that supplementary defences might be improved. Fortified regions were to be organized in





rear of the first and second positions so that, if the enemy attacked, his forward movement would be compelled to follow along well-defined channels; these regions would also serve as points of support for our own counter-offensives.

The portions of the front which at this time seemed to be particularly sensitive, those against which the enemy would appear to have reason to direct his efforts and consequently the parts which stood most in need of strengthening, were the following:

The country around Amiens, point of junction between the two Allied armies, and, therefore, a direction where the Germans might attempt to separate the British forces from the French.

The Valley of the Oise, leading as it did directly to Paris.

The region of Rheims, since this large city was a tempting prey to the enemy.

The region of the Argonne, through which the Germans might attempt the methodical reduction of the Verdun salient.

The heights of the Vosges, which constituted the buttress supporting our right wing.

The Porrentruy gap, covering the part of our front which faced Switzerland and needed by us as a base, in case the Germans violated Swiss neutrality.

These were the points against which, at this time, it seemed to me most likely that the enemy would launch an offensive. I must also add that I did not consider these different regions to be of equal importance. Undoubtedly, those which appeared the most sensitive were the country around Amiens, the Valley of the Oise and the region on the extreme right of our front, where the enemy might seek a strategic solution. On the other points, it did not seem likely that he could do more than gain local successes or effect partial rectifications of his front, no decisive results being attainable.

Nor did the front around Verdun, in view of the salient presented by its form, seem to me destined to become the theatre of the gigantic struggle which took place on its hills during the greater part of 1916. Due to the lack of material means sufficient to enable me to undertake an equal effort along all portions of the front, I was compelled to draw up a priority schedule of fortifications to be constructed; for the reasons which I have just explained, the region of Verdun did not come first.

Similar considerations guided me in the selection of those portions of the front behind which to place the 25 divisions that I desired to keep as reserves at my own disposal. In regard especially to the Second Army,



it was to assemble all of its ten divisions in the region of Amiens, Grandvillers, Compiègne, Meaux, behind those parts of the front which, strategically speaking, were the most delicate; at the same time I planned to put eight divisions in reserve south of the Avricourt railway line.

As a matter of fact, it was a long time before we had any precise indications as to the movements of the German reserves. At the beginning of December some abnormal activity was reported in the Woëvre. As a measure of precaution, I sent from Champagne to the region of Bar-le-Duc the VII Army Corps and the 15th Division; however, as the first indications were not confirmed, these divisions were put under training. But my attention was shortly afterwards drawn to the regions of Amiens and the Oise, where there were signs that the enemy was preparing for an offensive. On December 29th, at a conference held at Chantilly, under the presidency of M. Poincaré and at which M. Briand, General Gallieni, General Haig and the three commanders of our groups of armies assisted, we were all in agreement that the greatest danger lay in this quarter. Indeed, all the available troops which the Germans had were concentrated between the Oise and the sea; east of the Oise we could discover only two infantry divisions, belonging to the III Corps and located at Hirson and Sedan.

It may be well to relate here an incident which took place between Gallieni and myself with reference to the defensive organization of the front. On December 16th, he wrote me that "reports have come to me from various sources concerning the organization of the front, indicating that deficiencies exist in the condition of the works at certain points. In the regions of the Meurthe, Toul and Verdun notably, the line of trenches appears not to have been completed, as it has been along the greater part of the front. If the situation is as reported, it presents a very grave danger. Under these conditions, should the enemy effect a rupture of the line, not only would your responsibility be involved, but also that of the entire Government."

I confess that this letter impressed me disagreeably. Four days afterwards I answered in a long communication which set forth my point of view.

G.H.Q. December 18, 1915

From the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies  
To the Minister of War

(Personal.)

In your despatch No. 12703 D of December 16th you informed me that reports have come to you from various sources concerning the organization of the front, and indicating that deficiencies exist in the condition of the

works at certain points. This is notably the case in the regions of the Meurthe, Toul and Verdun where the line of trenches appears not to have been completed as it has been along the greater part of the front, etc. . . .

You ask me, therefore, to make it possible for you to give assurances that on every portion of our front at least two lines have been organized and that they have been provided with all the additional strength which passive obstacles, such as barbed wire, *blanc d'eau*, abatis and other obstructions, etc., can furnish.

I have the honour to inform you that in my instructions to army commanders dated October 22, 1915 (copy herewith), I united in a single document various orders, previously issued, covering the organization of our defensive lines. These instructions have in view more especially:

1. The improvement of the first and second positions of defence now existing along the whole front and each of which comprises several lines of trenches.

2. The organization behind these first and second positions of a system of fortified regions, some of which were already, at the time, in course of construction.

The execution of my orders has been constantly supervised by commanders of armies and groups of armies and verified by officers of my staff.

Existing works around our fortified towns in the East have been transformed in such a way as to give them a place in this system of fortified regions, and they now present several successive lines of defence.

This whole organization, established in accordance with a general plan, is now under construction and has been completed at a number of points on the front.\*

The maps of defences already constructed, which I send you herewith, will show that, in the regions mentioned in your despatch of December 16th, there now exist three or four successive positions, either wholly or nearly completed. This organization, taken as a whole, is much stronger and more complete than that of our adversaries.

Moreover, in execution of my instructions of October 22nd, above mentioned (these prescriptions being the result of our offensive of last September), the units withdrawn from the front have been organized into local reserves, army reserves and reserves of the Commander-in-Chief; in this way, while ensuring rest for the troops, it becomes possible to reinforce in a minimum of time any part of the front that may be attacked.

Measures have also been taken to assure the rapid move by rail of the reserves belonging to the Commander-in-Chief; these arrangements are hampered by the penury of railway material now at our disposal.

To sum up, I consider that nothing justifies the fears which, in the name of the Government, you express in your despatch of December 16th. However, since these fears are founded upon reports which have attracted your

\* While on this subject, it might be pointed out that the erection of passive obstacles has been delayed and continues to be delayed, in spite of my numerous requests, by the lack of a proper supply of barbed wire. I can, nevertheless, assure the Government that along the whole front the two principal positions of defence, at least, are now provided with sufficiently strong passive obstacles to give them the required resistance.

attention to deficiencies in our defensive organization, I request that these reports should be communicated to me with information as to their authorship.

I cannot permit men in the military service, placed under my orders, to send to the Government, through other than proper military channels, complaints or objections with regard to the execution of my orders. It is also no less disagreeable to me to have to defend myself against vague imputations from sources unknown to me.

The mere fact that the Government accepts communications of this nature, coming either from mobilized Members of Parliament, or, directly or indirectly, from officers serving at the front, is calculated to have a most serious effect upon military discipline. Soldiers who write these reports know that the Government takes them up with their chiefs; the authority of the latter is diminished and the morale of all suffers from the discredit thus implied.

I cannot admit the continuation of this state of affairs.

The Government's confidence is absolutely essential to me; if I have it, then the Government should neither encourage nor tolerate practices which undermine the moral authority without which I cannot continue properly to exercise my command.

J. JOFFRE

The incident was closed by a reply from Gallieni accepting my explanation. "The Government has full confidence in you," he wrote me, "and you must not consider its desire to be informed regarding the situation as a manifestation of distrust."<sup>1</sup>

It was not until January 10, 1916, that the first indications reached us regarding the possibility of an enemy attack in the region of Verdun, our Minister to Denmark having telegraphed that a German offensive northeast of that place was being talked about. This information was immediately confirmed by news coming from Switzerland, reporting the concentration of 400,000 men in the region of Verdun. Rumours were constantly reaching me, indicating successively almost every point of the front as being menaced by attack; nevertheless, these two reports, the one confirming the other, attracted my attention, in spite of the slight interest which it seemed that Verdun could offer to the Germans, and notwithstanding the unpropitiousness of the season for an offensive in this region.

I learned at the same time that movements of troops and important arrivals of men and material from Belgium and Lorraine, had been observed in the direction of Sedan, Carignan, Montmédy, Longuyon and Audun-le-Roman. My attention being thus directed towards the Verdun region, a study of the enemy works there immediately revealed that

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Minister of War, December 22, 1915.

the number of field railways had increased between Béthincourt and the Spincourt-Conflans line. The statements of prisoners added to other signs—such as the movement of staffs, the systematic destruction of church steeples throughout the region, the erection of works in the Bois de Spincourt and the Bois de Consenvoye—all tended to confirm these indications. Moreover, our Intelligence Bureau estimated that 17 German divisions were now available.

It is true that information coming from reliable sources continued to suggest as possible theatres of attack the Valley of the Oise, Rheims, Nancy or the Champagne area. But these rumours could no longer distract my attention from Verdun; therefore, immediately upon his return from Salonika, I sent General de Castelnau there to study the condition of the fortifications; I especially directed him to inspect the northern front, the one which appeared the more particularly menaced.

On his return he reported to me that on the whole the defensive organization complied with the instructions that had been given, and that if we took into consideration the resources available, the work done to put the Verdun region in a proper state of defence should be considered satisfactory. Nevertheless, while he was there he had indicated a number of improvements which should be effected—construction of dug-outs, assembly places for reserves, shelter for troops, their distribution, etc., etc.

In order to hasten the construction of defensive works, two divisions were immediately placed at the disposal of General Herr, commanding the fortified region of Verdun, and orders were given him to use them for this purpose. I also transferred the region from the Eastern Group of armies to the Central Group, since the defence of Verdun on the left bank of the Meuse should, logically, extend up to the Argonne; moreover, the question of communications suggested the advantage of placing the region under the orders of the Central Group.

Up to this time we had received nothing more than indications that an attack was contemplated; the first definite news was furnished on the 6th and 7th of February by deserters, who declared that important concentrations of troops were taking place on the left bank of the Meuse and in the region of Damvillers. No clear idea could be as yet formed as to the zone where they would be employed, and more especially, we were still unable to decide whether or not the attack would take place on both sides of the Meuse. Then a report arrived from one of the best of our agents, declaring that the Germans were going to undertake a big offensive in the region of Verdun, with attacks simultaneously directed

against Rheims and in the direction of Amiens; the Crown Prince was to be in charge of the operations. On February 14th we came into possession of the Crown Prince's order which was to be read to the troops at the opening of the attack. Doubt was no longer possible. The offensive was going to take place.

Four days later all this information was confirmed. Other deserters coming in declared that the attack had been fixed for February 13th, but had been put off on account of bad weather, and that it would take place on the first good day. The operation was to embrace the whole of the northern front and be carried out by forces amounting to four army corps.

To meet this threat, various means had been progressively placed at the disposal of General de Langle, who commanded the Central Group of Armies, his aircraft being reinforced as well as his heavy artillery. The Eastern Group of Armies had received orders to hold its reserves in Lorraine ready for entraining, so that they could be moved as soon as the order was given; new units were also placed under General Herr's orders.

As I wished to examine the situation for myself and establish contact with the various generals commanding in the Verdun region, I left for Bar-le-Duc on the evening of February 18th, and on the 19th I saw in succession General Herr, General Balfourier, commanding the XX Army Corps; General Bazelaire, commanding the VII Army Corps at Dombasle; and General Humbert commanding the Third Army at Nettancourt. All of them appeared to be awaiting the storm with perfect calm.

Herr already had 12 divisions at his disposal, either in sector or within easy reach; the next day, Balfourier's two divisions would begin detraining. Opposed to this force we estimated that the Germans probably had some 15 divisions on the two banks of the Meuse, between Avocourt and Etain.

In regard to my own action, I proposed to maintain my reserve of twenty-six divisions, echeloned along the entire front; for news of coming attacks on other points continued to arrive, and I was all the more induced to think that Verdun could not be the principal objective of the Germans, since the strategic results they could expect to attain there were entirely beyond my comprehension. Moreover, these reports did not cease to come in for a considerable time after the opening of the battle of Verdun, and it has always been my opinion that the failure of the surprise attack against the town and the turn which the battle took were the only reasons which prevented the other offensives from being under-

taken. A curious phenomenon of attraction, which clearly proves the weakness of the German High Command, obstinacy and an empty vain-gloriousness, led to the absorption by Verdun of all the forces which the Germans had available. From the point of view of German strategy, Verdun had no justification.

#### THE BATTLE OF VERDUN

At 10 o'clock on the morning of February 21st we learned at Chantilly that the attack on Verdun had commenced. A violent bombardment along the north-north-east front had been opened and fire was being directed simultaneously against our first and second positions from the Meuse up to the road leading towards Etain. Towards the end of the day news came that the German infantry had obtained a footing in some of the advanced trenches of the Bois des Caures and the Bois d'Herbebois. The next morning I learned of the successive captures of Haumont and the Bois des Caures. The report stated that the fighting had been very severe but the conduct of our troops had been excellent. At 10 a.m. on the 23rd I received news that Brabant had been evacuated the evening before. The same day we lost the major part of the Bois des Caures and the Bois de Wavrille; that evening we still held, but only precariously, the crest southeast of Haumont, the southern edge of the Bois des Caures, Beaumont and Ornes.

The violence of the attack made it evident early in the engagement that new reserves would have to be despatched. The I Corps and the XIII Corps had already been sent by motor transport to the region of Revigny—Bar-le-Duc, and the commanders of groups of armies had been warned to be ready to furnish reinforcements up to the extreme limit of their resources.

On the other hand, it continued to be altogether likely that the assault which the Germans were directing upon Verdun would not be the sole effort they would make, and that other attacks, more or less violent, might shortly be expected on other parts of the front. It seemed probable that for this purpose the enemy would select the portion of the line held by the French, as he was aware of the comparative thinness of our line and our feeble resources in men. Flanders and the north of France did not lend themselves at this season of the year to the development of a large offensive, and this hypothesis seemed confirmed by the fact that on those parts of the northern front held by British troops the enemy had maintained, as far as we could learn, only four divisions in reserve. An attack in this region, therefore, seemed improbable. For this reason I

decided, on the afternoon of the 22nd, to ask General Haig for his assistance. As he was not in a position to disengage Verdun by an immediate attack, he could come to our aid only by relieving our Tenth Army as quickly as possible, thus supplying us with new resources. At the same time that I telegraphed my appeal to him, I asked Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, to support my request with the British Commander-in-Chief.

The replies came immediately, and they were what I wanted—indeed, what I might expect, from two such loyal soldiers. Robertson answered that he had represented to Haig how important it was to lend us every possible assistance; the next morning Haig telegraphed that not only had he given orders immediately to relieve the French 18th Division and later on the entire XVII Corps, but that he intended to make a personal appeal to London to get reinforcements sent from Egypt. Upon returning to his headquarters, Haig telephoned, "I have made arrangements to relieve the whole of your Tenth Army; tomorrow I am coming to Chantilly to see you and place myself entirely at your service."

On the evening of the 23rd the news coming from Verdun was so alarming that I sent Colonel Claudel, my assistant chief of staff, to make a personal examination of the situation. Early on the afternoon of the next day he telephoned that the German attack had slowed down and it looked as though we would be able to hold out and even make a counter-attack.

But the situation suddenly changed. A furious attack was delivered against the Bois des Fosses, Louvemont and hill 344; the Bois des Fosses appeared to have been taken, Ornes was evacuated, and the enemy seemed to have progressed along the Côtes des Meuse. There was no doubt that conditions were serious; for if this information was exact, if the German advance in this direction continued, its effect would be to cause the retirement of our troops in the Woëvre. This is what General de Langle explained to me by telephone towards 7.30 p.m. When he asked my orders with regard to the evacuation of the Woëvre, my reply was that I left him free to take such decisions as he, who was on the spot, deemed necessary; however, I told him that I had fully decided to resist the German attack by facing northward and maintaining our positions on the *right bank* of the Meuse, between the river and the Woëvre.

Nevertheless, the information which General de Langle had sent caused me considerable anxiety. Indeed, its very vagueness, the rapidity with which the situation was continuing to change, made it my duty to anticipate the worst and prepare to meet it as quickly as possible. It was

to be feared the troops on the northern face and those in the Woëvre would be overthrown and forced to fall back in disorder to the left bank. If this happened they would become incapable of resisting the enemy's advance, and our front at this point would be seriously compromised.

After long reflection I came to the conclusion that the best way to bring this dangerous advance of the enemy to a standstill would be by sending fresh troops to the left bank of the Meuse with the double purpose of preventing the enemy from crossing the river and of receiving our troops in case they were driven over to the right bank. I also considered that it would increase the resistance of this barrage if the command of this portion of the field were given to a man who, freed from the emotions of the battle being fought on the right bank, would have no other preoccupation than to prevent the river being crossed. In fact, this solution consisted in abandoning only what was already lost, if it was admitted, as General de Langle feared, that the forces in the Woëvre and on the Hauts-de-Meuse would be driven back in disorder.

As soon as this decision was taken in principle, the next thing to do was to execute it rapidly. At 11 p.m., I called up Mouy, headquarters of the Second Army, then in reserve on the right bank of the Oise, and informed General Pétain that he was to take command of all the forces on the left bank of the Meuse and all others that would arrive in this region; headquarters of the Second Army would move immediately to Bar-le-Duc; General Pétain was requested to stop on his way to that place and see me at Chantilly, in order to receive his instructions. By midnight of the 24th all the orders had been given.

During that night of February 24/25, 1916, I wished more than at any time in my life that I had the gift of omnipresence. I felt that decisions I was taking at Chantilly, far from the scene of action, based upon uncertain information and predicated upon such conceptions as I could form of a constantly changing situation, ran the risk of being nullified before they could be transmitted to those who were to execute them. For this reason I would have liked to be at Verdun.

On the other hand, my duty unquestionably was to remain at my headquarters. Here I could best fulfil my rôle of sending reserves to the battle, supervising the rest of the front and ensuring the collaboration of our Allies. However, realising that useful decisions, if they were to be taken in time, could only be taken on the spot, I requested General de Castelnau to proceed to Verdun and there represent me—but first assuring himself that the situation was really that which we pictured it to be from the information furnished by General de Langle. He was espe-



cially to examine whether the mission I had in view for the Second Army conformed to existing circumstances.

I authorized him to use his own initiative in taking whatever decisions seemed advisable, basing himself upon this idea, that we must at any price defend the north front between Douaumont and the Meuse, and the east front along the Hauts-de-Meuse; only in case of absolute impossibility must our forces fall back to the left bank after the Second Army had established itself there.

The intelligence and resolution which General de Castelnau displayed in carrying out this mission are a matter of history. From Souilly, to which place had been transferred the headquarters of the Fortified Region of Verdun, he telephoned me at 3.30 p.m., February 25th, that he had found General Herr fatigued to the point of depression by all he had endured since the German attack opened, and he was no longer capable of inspiring his command with the energy required by the circumstances facing us. His staff, moreover, was no longer in a condition to give him the support of which he stood in need. After examining the situation with the commanders of sectors, de Castelnau considered that there was still time to halt the German attack on the right bank of the Meuse. He, therefore, proposed to place General Pétain in command of the whole of the Fortified Region of Verdun and of the troops then arriving on the left bank of the Meuse, the mission of the Second Army being to check the effort which the enemy was making on the north front of the Verdun salient.

I replied approving all of these decisions; and indeed I was extremely pleased to learn that the real situation at Verdun was not as desperate as it had been represented and that General Pétain's mission had been so happily modified. General de Castelnau placed General Herr under the orders of General Pétain for the purpose of furnishing him with all needed information, while the old staff of the fortified region was to be used to reinforce progressively the staffs of army corps recently arrived in the zone of the battle.

It was in this way that the solution of this delicate problem was arrived at—a solution which ultimately saved Verdun. Once more the stability of our front had become almost wholly a matter that was to depend upon the resolution of the men who commanded there. It was the realization of this fact which led me, when I learned, during the evening of the 26th, that Bonneval's division, occupying the Côte du Talau and the Côte du Poivre, believing itself menaced by a turning movement on its right, had fallen back to Froide Terre, to remind all that the situation

facing us required that the orders given to hold on to the right bank of the Meuse north of Verdun should be rigorously observed. I directed that any officer who gave orders for his unit to retreat should be brought before a court-martial. On the 22nd, General Bapst had already evacuated Brabant under questionable circumstances, and now it was General Bonneval who was giving up the Côte du Poivre. Urgent measures had to be taken, and I directed General de Castelnau to make an investigation. This order crossed a letter from him in which he suggested that General de Bonneval be tried by a court-martial.<sup>2</sup>

The retirement of our troops from the Woëvre to the Hauts-de-Meuse, which General de Langle had decided upon on the 24th, was executed in good order. On the evening of the 25th, the enemy had carried the Douaumont fort by surprise, but on the 26th the impression prevailed that he had given up the idea of trying to advance along the ground immediately bordering the Meuse, by reason of the powerful flanking fire which we directed from the left bank. The situation was improving both materially and morally, and during the evening General de Castelnau wrote me that if we could gain two or three days in which to enable General Pétain to put things in order and make his action felt the danger of losing Verdun most probably would have definitely passed.

As a matter of fact, the enemy's plan for taking the town by a surprise attack had broken down. All the troops which he had assembled for this purpose had been engaged, and he was now faced by the necessity of bringing up new forces for feeding the battle. The long and arduous struggle developed into one of attrition, which continued without pause until the first Russian offensive, and afterwards the Franco-British offensive on the Somme, obliged the Germans to take up a defensive attitude on this part of the front.

In order to give complete freedom to General Pétain and permit General de Langle to consecrate himself entirely to the Fourth and Fifth Armies, before which the enemy continued to make preparations for attack, I decided on the 27th of February to place the Second Army under the direct orders of G.H.Q.; the Third Army, whose action—above all on its right—was closely related to that of the Second, passed to the control of General Pétain.

The Battle of Verdun offers one more proof that in all the affairs of war nothing is more important than the way the command is exercised. On February 26th, General Pétain organized the Second Army into four

<sup>2</sup> As a consequence of the investigation set on foot, General Bapst and General Bonneval were relieved from their commands.

groups, placed in the energetic hands of Generals Bazelaire, Guillaumat, Balfourier and Duchêne. The next day the enemy resumed his attacks, and by a violent action which continued throughout the day of the 28th, he endeavoured to disengage the Douaumont Fort, which we had surrounded. This time, however, we repulsed his attacks on the Bois du Chauffour and the village of Douaumont, as well as to the east of the fort in the Bois de la Caillette and on the heights north of the village of Vaux. While this first success was unquestionably due to the courage displayed by our troops and their devoted self-sacrifice, it was no less attributable to the energetic method in which the command was exercised, marked as it now was by an invincible determination to halt the enemy at any cost.

Therefore, when General de Castelnau returned from Verdun on the 29th of February, in making his report he felt himself justified in expressing the hope that Verdun was for the moment safe. This first result being accomplished, it seemed to me that the best way of arresting any succeeding efforts of the enemy would be by retaking the ground which he had conquered. Our ammunition was plentiful and our flanking positions on the left bank made it possible to bring the enemy under a convergent fire; this chance must, therefore, not be neglected, and when General Pétain took command I indicated it to him as his earliest task. During the conversations we had on the 1st and 5th of March, when I visited him at Souilly, I renewed this recommendation. The most important of these operations should be the retaking of the fort at Douaumont.

On March 6th the Germans made a new effort against the Mort-Homme and the Bois des Corbeaux; on the 8th the fighting was intense along the whole line from the Côte du Poivre to the borders of the Vaux fort, and on March 22nd the battle was again renewed at precisely the moment when, in company with the President of the Republic, the Prince Regent of Servia and General da Cadorna, I made a visit to Verdun.

These attacks led the Commander of the Second Army to make repeated requests for reinforcements, to all of which I acceded. Towards the end of March, little by little, thanks to the uninterrupted arrival of reserves, the Second Army found itself in greater strength than the forces opposed to it, and I thought that the moment had arrived for exploiting this advantage. It was most essential for us to take and keep the initiative. In my opinion this was the most efficacious method of preventing the enemy from making any further progress.

However, during each of the frequent visits that I made to Souilly, I gathered the impression that the Commander of the Second Army had not sufficiently grasped this idea. In contact as he was with the daily realities of this violent battle and constantly menaced by new attacks, he showed too marked a tendency, perhaps an attribute of his temperament, to look upon the defensive as the only possible attitude. With each new threat of attack he sent me new requests for troops. These were never accompanied by any allusion to plans for a counter-offensive, and he informed me in advance that he would certainly be obliged to ask me for further reinforcements. This went on to such an extent that at the end of March I had at my disposal only one fresh army corps, the IX.

Towards the beginning of April, this attitude of General Pétain brought about a certain amount of disagreement between us. He was perfectly aware of the general situation along the front and was fully acquainted with the indications so frequently observed of attacks in preparation—sometimes against Rheims, sometimes in Champagne, sometimes in the valley of the Oise; above all, he was cognizant of my plan for a combined Franco-British attack which would permit me to count with certainty upon relieving the pressure on Verdun at an early date. It was, of course, true that the Germans appeared to have put into the battle since February 21st some 400,000 men and that we estimated their losses at 200,000; but it was likewise true that 39 of our own divisions had been successively engaged. The two efforts, therefore, were comparable, and I repeatedly urged upon General Pétain the need of striking back, pointing out to him that if we never recovered, little by little, the ground we had lost, we would be faced with a very dangerous situation. I insisted especially that the continued progress of the enemy south of the Forges brook entailed the re-establishment of our line farther forward, by means of a vigorous and powerful offensive, unless we were prepared to face the loss of Béthincourt.

My insistence at last began to bear fruit. One of General Pétain's lieutenants, General Nivelle, commanding the III Corps, had undertaken, beginning on April 3rd, a series of actions in the region of Douaumont which had been crowned with success. On April 10th I inspected this sector and was so agreeably impressed by the results obtained that I asked Pétain to give General Nivelle the means of pursuing his advantage on the right and left of Douaumont.

But Pétain's demands became more and more pressing. He complained of the quality and quantity of reserves placed at his disposal; in

particular he requested that the troops sent to him should be taken from amongst those which had not yet fought at Verdun, and that he did not desire any of the recruits of the class of 1916, as they were likely to be too much affected by the bombardment. Under various pretexts he also delayed returning to me the units withdrawn from the front, in order that he might add them to those which he kept at his own disposal, considering, as he always did, that the forces I intended to send the Second Army were not sufficient; likewise, the staffs of units were only relieved after considerable delay.<sup>3</sup>

And yet General Pétain knew that my insistence upon these points was due to my desire rapidly to reconstitute the corps and divisions with a view to their future employment elsewhere. He was perfectly aware that at the same time I was furnishing him troops for the battle of Verdun, I was endeavouring to collect together the largest possible number of divisions for the Somme offensive. Finally, remembering how powerful was the artillery placed at the disposal of the Second Army, it seemed evident that an aggressive defence would not only bring better results than any passive defence but it would be more economical. Therefore, when I sent General Pétain the IX Corps, the last available unit which had not taken part in the battle of Verdun, I warned him that hereafter he must count solely upon his own resources or upon troops which had already taken part in the battle; I pointed out to him that opposed to him were some German units which had been sent three times to the attack! The Commander of the Second Army was endowed with very great qualities and these, during the course of the war, and especially at the beginning of the Battle of Verdun, have brought him a justly earned reputation. What saved Verdun was his highly developed tactical sense, his continual perfecting of the methods of defence, and the constant improvement he effected in the organization of the command of the higher units. General Pétain was the heart and soul of the action. Moreover, it should never be forgotten that it was his accurate and unceasing study of the enemy's fighting methods that brought about in our own army the greatest tactical improvement seen in it at any time during the war; this is especially true of the fruitful liaison he effected between the aviation and the artillery. Under his intelligent direction, Verdun was, if the hardest, at the same time the best practical school of application the French Army ever had.

On the other hand, the very great qualities of this most eminent

<sup>3</sup> For example, it took from March 25 to April 6, 1916, to entrain the XIII Corps when it was returned to my control.

leader were affected by a condition of mind which caused him to place an exaggerated importance upon the events happening at Verdun. If I had yielded to his demands, the whole French Army would have been absorbed in this battle, and we would have been obliged to renounce all hope of taking any part in the offensive decided upon at Chantilly the previous December; it would have meant accepting the imposition of the enemy's will. My determination, on the contrary, was to keep ever in view the possibility of reversing the situation by an Allied action on the Somme, and to this end I determined to keep available the greatest possible number of French units.

All of this will explain how it came about that early in April I looked about for means of withdrawing General Pétain from the battlefield of Verdun, hoping that by giving him a more distant perspective, a wider front upon which to direct his action, he would take in the general situation with a clearer view. The command of the Centre Group of Armies had become vacant through the departure of General de Langle, and the occasion seemed a good one to reward the services which General Pétain had rendered and at the same time place him at that distance which it seemed to me was, under the circumstances, desirable.

I, therefore, informed him that he was to take command of the Centre Group of Armies, and I sent Castelnau to Souilly to ask him on what date he wished to enter upon his duties. He was not pleased, and he answered that when wanted he could be found any day at Souilly.

He assumed command of his group of armies on May 2nd. On the 3rd, I went to see him at Bar-le-Duc, where his headquarters were established, and took him with me on a round of visits to the command posts of the Second Army. During this trip I was struck by his pessimism; and I received confirmation of this condition of mind shortly after. I had asked General Pétain to write me periodically his ideas regarding what was going on and what plans he had in view. On May 7th he sent me a long and interesting letter in which he explained his conception of the general situation. He started out by saying that thanks to the new German system of making their attacks with a small amount of infantry and a large number of guns, we were slowly but surely becoming used up, and he advanced the theory that if the Allies did not soon intervene we would finish by being beaten.

He asserted that France's part in the Coalition's effort for 1916 should be considered as having been fulfilled by the resistance she had made in front of Verdun, and that nothing more should be asked of her. No

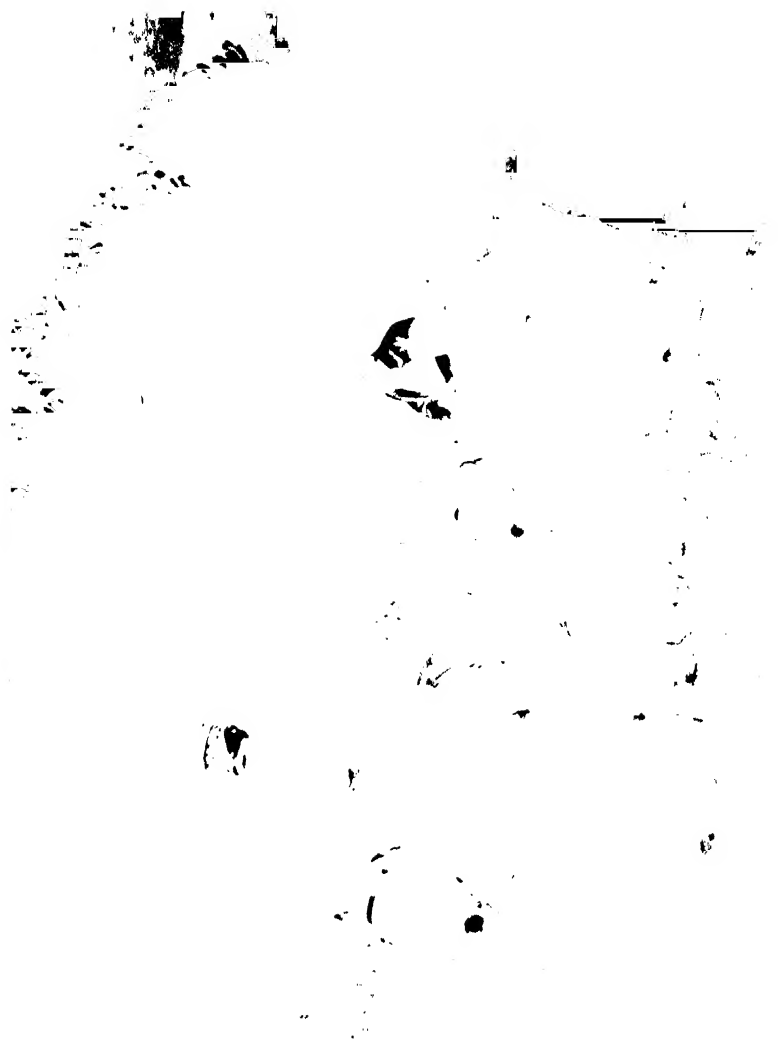
reason, therefore, existed for trying to economize on the forces sent to the Second Army, for, in his opinion, the best way to relieve Verdun was to have the British start an intervention as quickly as possible and in a form which would avoid employing any sudden and violent action such as had marked the assaults in Champagne and Artois in 1915. His idea, on the contrary, was to prepare a series of attacks which would continue throughout a long period. For example, assemble three or four groups at chosen points, distribute each of these groups in depth, and have the team in front always ready to attack. "It is better," he wrote, "to keep the Germans under the constant menace of an eruption than to confront them with an extinct volcano."

I was naturally in agreement with Pétain as to the necessity of disengaging Verdun by an attack directed against another part of the front; this indeed was precisely the object I was pursuing in endeavouring to secure the execution of the decisions taken at the Chantilly Conference. I also shared his opinion as to the form to be given to the offensive, which should not be any mere "flash in the pan"; for it was evident that it was by no short, violent action that the Germans could be prevented from renewing their attacks against Verdun. However, the question did not stop at Verdun, which, after all, was only one incident in the general struggle; the object we had in view was victory, and since the Germans had undertaken a war of attrition, it was for us on our side to conduct it with due economy, and turn the situation to our advantage by making attacks only when we could profitably assume the rôle of attackers. In this way we would cause a melting of the enemy's reserves and reduce his front to nothing more than a thin barrier which, if we economized our own reserves, could be broken down by the combined blows of all the Allies and permit the passage of our victorious battalions. In this game it was certain that we also would suffer wastage, but the enemy would be worn down; the whole question lay in conducting our affairs with such wisdom as to enable us to last longer than he did. In war it is the final battalions that bring victory.

Ever since the opening of the Battle of Verdun I had firmly believed that in no other way than this could the affairs of the Coalition be conducted so as to conclude the war successfully, and, in my opinion, this applied to France especially. It was precisely for this reason that I could not bring myself entirely to agree with General Pétain.

If the battle undertaken to disengage Verdun was to be conducted long enough to effect its purpose, the units sent to the Second Army would have to be used to the extreme limit of their endurance. By thus

GOING UP TO THE LINE IN ALSAVE.







devoting to the defensive operations around the fortress only a minimum of troops, the largest possible number of fresh units might be made ready for the attack on the Somme.

It was not true that Verdun could suffice as the sole contribution to be demanded of the French Army during this campaign. In the first place, if the German offensive could bring about such a result and prevent us from taking part in a concerted action with the Coalition, it would manifestly be a great success for the enemy, for he would have succeeded in eliminating from the struggle his first and principal adversary. Again, from a moral point of view, in order clearly to mark the failure of the enemy's attempt against Verdun, it was imperative for us to keep to the engagement made by the Allies in December, 1915. If the offensive which the Coalition had in view was to succeed, it had to be carried out with every available man, and it was, therefore, our duty to add the largest possible number of French units to the battalions the British were consecrating to it. Moreover, we had reason to hope that this offensive would bring about a definite victory under the form of a break through; if this supreme act was to be accomplished, it was important from every point of view that the French Army should be on hand. There was another point. The Commander of the Centre Group of Armies wanted the Allied offensive to start as quickly as possible. Here again he and I were not in agreement. A plan of action had been arranged amongst the Allies, based upon the principle of simultaneous attacks on all the fronts. For reasons already explained, it was not until the end of June that they could take place. If we asked the British to advance this date, the result would be to destroy the whole effect counted upon. The Coalition would revert to its futile attempts of 1915 and we would risk giving to the offensive neither sufficient amplitude nor proper preparation.

All of these considerations prevented me from sharing Pétain's ideas. We started out from two entirely different points of view: he wanted all the French forces devoted to Verdun; I, on the contrary, insisted upon devoting to this battle of attrition, from which I could hope to obtain no strategic results whatever, only a strict minimum of forces.

At this time most singular rumours were current, in governmental spheres and amongst the public, as to the relations existing between the various general officers. This gossip assumed such proportions that General Roques, on May 12th, went to Verdun to see Pétain. He came back fully reassured, and on the 13th he wrote me that he had given his colleagues, that very morning, during a Cabinet meeting, a most reas-

sure statement, and he had repeated it that same evening before the Military Committee of the Chamber of Deputies. I, nevertheless, had the feeling that I would like to give the commanders of groups of armies an opportunity to lay before me their opinions; therefore, on May 17th, I brought them together at Châlons with the idea of discussing the general situation. On his way to this conference, Foch had a slight motor accident, which obliged him to go to Meaux to have himself attended to. I went to see him there, and found him considerably disturbed by the outlook for the Somme offensive, then in course of preparation. Its scope had already been greatly reduced because we had been obliged to send so many divisions to Verdun, and Foch now feared that it was on the point of becoming irremediably compromised. I reassured him by telling him of my firm determination not to lend myself to the game the Germans were trying to induce us to play.

During the meeting at Châlons, although Pétain continued to express his doubts as to the advisability of our projected attack on the Somme, he was willing to agree with me—and Franchet d'Esperey, commanding the Eastern Group of Armies, was of the same opinion—that a general offensive undertaken by all the Allied forces would be the best method of disengaging Verdun.

To put my plans into execution I was obliged to exercise the closest economy in regard to that fortress, and this could only be accomplished by requiring General Pétain to get the most he could out of the forces at his disposal—sending the units successively into action, reducing the density on the fronts of the calmer sectors, and especially in the one around Rheims where the threats of attack had not materialized, and placing in quiet sectors, even before they had been reconstituted, the divisions taken out of the line at Verdun.

These considerations led me to reply to new requests for reinforcements, which arrived on the 20th of May, that General Pétain's schedule for the employment of the forces under his orders did not seem to make provision for using all the fresh units now available in his armies, some of these being eliminated for reasons which did not seem to me sufficient, others for reasons which had not been given.

However, a less passive attitude had now been assumed on both banks of the Meuse. On the right bank, General Mangin, with the intense energy which always characterized that officer, had, on May 22nd, retaken Douaumont, bringing about, however, on this part of the front a reaction so violent that we lost the fort again on the 24th. On the left bank, at Mort-Homme, our advance had been almost constant during a

month. Thanks to this new attitude, the progress of the Germans seemed to have been stopped. But General Pétain made these operations the pretext for representing to me that the consumption of our forces on the Verdun front, instead of being one division every other day, as we had formerly calculated, now reached the figure of two divisions every three days. He likewise complained of his inferiority in artillery. He, therefore, asked that large reinforcements both in the matter of fresh divisions and of artillery should be sent him. After a close study of the essential requirements of the Second Army, I decided that if, as I firmly intended, and as I had informed General Pétain, I was to be in a position to undertake an offensive south of the Somme by the first of July, it was impossible entirely to satisfy his requests, more especially in respect of heavy howitzers. Moreover, the fronts of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Armies were now quite calm, and it seemed to me that the enemy was so thoroughly occupied with the Verdun attack that some of Pétain's needs could be filled by taking artillery from these more passive sectors.

Towards the end of May the Germans had become fixed on the northern slopes of hill 304, this being the sole result obtained by their furious attacks between the 4th and 10th of May; but their counter-offensive had again given them possession of the heights of Mort-Homme, which the XXXII Corps had previously torn from them foot by foot; they had also retaken Douaumont fort, but had failed to recover the Bois de la Caillette, which they had lost on May 2nd.

I thus felt justified in saying that if the offensive actions undertaken by the Second Army had not wholly succeeded, they had at least prevented the enemy from making any appreciable progress during the month of May.

But on June 1st the Germans resumed their attacks with fury on the right bank, from the Bois Nawé to Damloup. During this exceptionally heavy fighting, General Pétain reported to me that he had need of four new divisions. The fort at Vaux fell on June 6th and on the 8th the struggle was renewed with fresh violence, the Bavarian I Corps penetrating our trenches between Thiaumont Farm and the Bois de la Caillette.

I had been obliged to leave my headquarters on the evening of June 8th, for the purpose of accompanying the Prime Minister to London. I remained absent on the 9th and 10th, and it was thus General de Castelnau who received the report giving the details of the German attack of the 8th. When I returned from London I learned that this news had produced considerable emotion at G.H.Q., where no little excite-

ment prevailed. De Castelnau had telephoned to British G.H.Q. asking that preparations for the British attack should be pushed forward; he had also telephoned to Foch, who immediately arrived at my headquarters, where his imperturbable serenity calmed the mounting fear.

For Pétain had once more scared everybody. Having only a limited confidence in the length of time that Verdun could resist, he had even gone so far as to telephone de Castelnau that the place could not hold out longer than eight days and that a retreat to the left bank of the Meuse would have to be immediately envisaged, if the artillery on the right bank was to be saved. I found de Castelnau deeply impressed by what had taken place and by his conversations with Pétain.

The latter, more and more disturbed by the turn the battle had taken, renewed on June 11th the efforts he had already made on May 7th, to induce me to fix an early date for the British offensive. He depicted the situation in very dark colours, complained of the insufficiency of his artillery, which he said was fighting one against two, and expressed the fear that a rapid decision would be obtained against the Second Army, to accomplish which the enemy, in his opinion, would hesitate at no sacrifice. I thereupon decided to send General de Castelnau to Verdun the next morning so as to obtain his judgment on the situation.

De Castelnau returned to G.H.Q. during the night of June 13th/14th, bringing a most favourable impression of the condition of affairs at Verdun. The morale was excellent, the defensive organization of the second and third positions was being strengthened, and he was of the opinion that Verdun could hold out long enough to permit our offensive on the Somme to take place at the time agreed upon.

However, before even receiving Pétain's letter, I had on June 11th sent instructions to General des Vallières, Chief of the French Mission at British G.H.Q., directing him to represent to General Haig that the strained situation at Verdun rendered it most desirable that all arrangements should be made for an infantry attack to take place on June 25th. Replying to Pétain's letter of the 11th, I wrote him the next day as follows:

I am of your opinion that the Germans count upon obtaining most important results from the battle they are conducting against Verdun and that we should at all cost maintain ourselves on the right bank of the Meuse, even at the risk of abandoning a part of the artillery in position there.

I do not underestimate the increasing difficulties of your task, but I have entire confidence that you will continue to beat back the enemy as you have done up to the present with such brilliant success.

The defensive organizations that you have projected are now being executed on both banks of the river, and I know that you are hastening and will continue to hasten their completion.

The divisions intended for the relief of those at present engaged can now be counted upon. The reliefs and reinforcements in heavy artillery which you are providing or have ordered, as well as the new matériel already received and that to be sent you as delivered, have already increased your resources, and these will now continue to expand.

The present moment is one of great seriousness. The prolonged and successful defence of Verdun has already made it possible for the Russians to achieve great results in their offensives, and it constitutes the indispensable and inevitable element of success for the Coalition in the present campaign. Nothing has been neglected, nothing must be neglected, which will ensure this result, and I count upon your energy to imbue your subordinates, officers as well as men, with the spirit of self-sacrifice, the passionate confidence and the determination to resist to the bitter end which you yourself have displayed.

All arrangements have been made to launch the offensive on the Western front at as early a date as possible, consistent with the carefully calculated preparations without which it is foredoomed to failure.

Finally, I decided to make an appeal to the heroic defenders of Verdun, showing them the importance of the rôle the Second Army had played up to this time and which it must continue to play until our ends were accomplished.

On June 12th, I addressed them in the following General Order:

Soldiers of the Second Army:

The Russian armies have just won a brilliant victory over the Austro-Germans opposed to them. In less than eight days they have broken through the enemy's front and driven him in rout before them. Over 105,000 prisoners and 120 guns have been taken, along with considerable other booty.

The success won by the bravery of our brothers-in-arms marks a happy beginning of the general offensive of the Allied forces. Other offensives are now being prepared, and still others will be started in the near future. Attacked on all sides, the Central Powers will soon be forced to bow before the superiority of the armies of the Coalition. The plan devised by the Allies is now entering upon its full execution.

Soldiers of Verdun! It is your valour which has made this possible, for your heroic resistance was the indispensable condition to our success. Upon it still depends our future victory. Upon all the vast theatres of Europe, thanks to you, there now exists a situation out of which will spring the definite triumph of our cause.

I make one more appeal to your courage, your ardour, your spirit of sacrifice, your love of country. Hold fast and strive with all your might to shatter the last desperate efforts of an enemy now at bay.

Many indications now suggested that the enemy's attacks against Verdun would soon begin to slacken in intensity. Between June 8th and 20th no fresh unit was identified along this front. The volume of artillery fire diminished on the left bank of the river, where the enemy appeared to be withdrawing some of his batteries: it looked as though he was beginning to move troops from our front towards the east, as a consequence of the Russian successes in Galicia, and already I began to hope that I would now be able gradually to withdraw a number of units from the Centre Group of Armies for the benefit of the Northern Group, whose operations were about to begin. Indeed, this possibility seemed so evident that on June 20th General Pétain showed himself to be in agreement with the idea, although its execution would have to be delayed until our positions around Verdun had been sufficiently widened; in any case the enemy must be prevented from taking troops from that region in order to employ them elsewhere.

This was the situation when the Germans recommenced their attacks on the fortress. On June 21st and 22nd, they tried in vain to gain ground at hill 304 and at Mort-Homme on the left bank; on the right bank, during the night of the 22nd, they obtained a footing between the Bois de Fumin and Le Chesnois, and on the 23rd Bavarian troops seized the fort at Thiaumont; some of the enemy's troops even succeeded in reaching the works at Froide Terre; Fleury fell under the assaults of the German Alpine corps.

During the course of this attack, towards 3 p.m., Pétain telephoned from Bar-le-Duc to de Castelnau that the situation looked serious; he envisaged the evacuation of the right bank of the Meuse "where one-third of the French artillery was in position." On the other hand, from Souilly, General Nivelle, who had replaced General Pétain at the head of the Second Army, sent me reassuring reports. He had collected a division and a half and given them orders to counter-attack that night and the next morning, in an effort to reduce the salient which the Germans had made at Fleury; another division was in readiness to make an additional attack if that became necessary. Contrary to the idea which seemed to prevail at Bar-le-Duc, there was no thought at Souilly of the possibility of having to retire to the left bank of the Meuse.

It thus seemed evident that the Second Army had sufficient force to break up the German offensive, and there was good reason for anticipating that this would be done. Moreover, during the evening General Pétain telephoned again; this time he looked at the situation more calmly and his conversation contrasted strangely with what he had said before.

The fighting went on during the whole of that night and the day of June 24th, but the Germans, driven back by our counter-attacks to the outskirts of the Thiaumont fort, now held only the ravine of Les Vignes.

At 12.30 p.m. I received from the Minister of War a most singular telephonic message. In it he urged me to make sure that nothing delayed the British attack, and he called my attention to the responsibility I was assuming; moreover, he informed me that he was going to Verdun the next day to learn for himself what was going on. Exactly two hours later the Prime Minister passed through Chantilly. I went to the station to pay him my respects and took advantage of the occasion to express my astonishment at the communication I had just received. M. Briand apprised me that the sending of this message was due to the President of the Republic, who, during a meeting of the Cabinet, had shown himself deeply disturbed by the news of the attacks of June 23rd. This was confirmed the same evening by M. Albert Thomas, whom I had invited to dinner. After discussing with him the subject of our supply of guns and ammunition, I took occasion to represent to the Minister of Munitions how extremely embarrassing it was to have the Government interfere in the conduct of operations. M. Albert Thomas felt as I did that General Roques' message was all the more inopportune since I had that very morning informed the Government and General Pétain himself that the artillery preparation for the attack on the Somme was about to begin.

Nevertheless, it was impossible for me to understand the emotion caused in Paris by the events of June 23rd, unless it was that direct communication was going on between the Government and the staff at Bar-le-Duc. I already had my suspicions, but these were confirmed on the 25th by M. Combes, who lunched with me at G.H.Q.

On the 26th I saw General Roques on his way back from Verdun. We had an explanation with regard to the famous message of the 24th, after which he confided to me the impressions received during the course of his visit. These reflected some anxiety in regard to General Pétain. The latter had declared to the Minister that he lacked by one-fourth the heavy artillery he considered he ought to have. I could not help remarking to General Roques how astonished I was that the Commander of the Centre Group of Armies had not addressed his request direct to me; moreover, I considered that by drawing upon the quieter sectors of his armies he could easily find enough matériel to supply what he thought was needed at Verdun; finally, I was quite astonished that, having been informed the day before that the artillery preparation on the Somme was



in full progress, he could choose such a moment to ask for additional guns; he might have comprehended that everything I had was being sent to the North. In any case the request was inopportune, to say the least—the rôle of Verdun was over, the interest was now elsewhere.

This conversation made me fear that Pétain had once more allowed himself to be too much impressed by the enemy, and I took measures again to prescribe that he was to continue a vigorous resistance on the right bank of the Meuse without permitting himself to be influenced by the fear that he might lose some of his artillery. However, on the 29th the Germans seemed to have made up their minds to assume a defensive attitude, and the next day the French retook the Fort at Thiaumont.

On July 1st the Franco-British attack, which had been postponed for two days by bad weather, at last began; the Second Army, answering the appeal I had made to it on June 12th, had brought the enemy to a standstill before Verdun.

France had supported the whole weight of the enemy's attacks ever since February 21st; that is, during the time required to so prepare the combined offensives agreed upon during the Chantilly Conference of December 6, 1915, that they could be carried out with good prospect of success.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

#### *The Second Phase of the Verdun Victory*

THE plan of operations for the campaign of 1916, the approval of which I had obtained from the representatives of the Allied Armies, had as its basis, as I have said before, one dominant idea; this was that we must seek to obtain a decision through simultaneous offensives on the Russian, Italian and Franco-British fronts.

Immediately after the close of the Inter-Allied Conference, I began to prepare for the Franco-British battle, where my action would be direct. For this purpose I caused the necessary studies to be started and opened negotiations with British G.H.Q. The first thing to do was to decide on the object we wished to attain. The operations of the autumn of 1915 had clearly shown that no decision could be secured until the enemy's reserves had first been used up.

During the year 1915 the French Army had been called upon for such prolonged efforts, entailing such serious sacrifices, that I considered it indispensable for the British to undertake this wearing-down process. The idea of what was fair and equitable was not the sole reason which moved me to ask our Allies to undertake the work; our reserves in men were now so low that if I did not husband them we would run the risk of seeing the French Army incapable of taking its share in the decisive battle when the time arrived.

This first point being settled, the next was to determine the region in which our principal effort should be made. On December 15, 1915, I directed the Commanders of Groups of Armies to make preliminary studies of those sectors which seemed to lend themselves best to a powerful offensive. At the outset I did not consider it essential that the ground chosen for the French attack should be contiguous to that selected for the British. While this contiguity presented undoubted advantages, my experience during the battles of 1915 had shown me that it was difficult to obtain fully concerted action between French and British troops in

these operations; above all I did not wish it to appear that I was trying to force my choice of the theatre of operations upon our Allies, for in case of failure they might easily reproach me with having restricted their liberty.

The next question was the preventive offensives which I expected the British Army to undertake, with a view to wearing down, before the decisive action took place, the 25 divisions which, according to our calculations, the enemy held in reserve on the Western front. In regard to this point, the British Commander-in-Chief and his staff did not seem to have any very definite plans in view.

Sir Douglas Haig was inclined to think that this attrition could be effected by means of numerous partial attacks, undertaken along the whole front as soon as spring opened. Both French and British troops would share in them and they would be kept up until the moment for the general offensive arrived.

General Butler, Assistant Chief of Staff, and General Davidson, Chief of the Operations Branch, considered that the wearing down of the German strategic reserves could be realized only by two or three preliminary attacks, executed along fronts of from 12 to 20 miles and in sectors at some distance from the one selected for the principal offensive, thus inducing a withdrawal of the enemy reserves from the latter region. In their opinion, these preliminary attacks should take place from 8 to 15 days before the date fixed for the general battle, thus constituting a preparatory phase of the principal action.

The latter conception offered one serious objection. The British Army had not sufficient heavy artillery to enable all of these fronts of attack to be equipped at the same time; as a consequence the preparatory actions ran the risk of being treated too economically in the matter of men and munitions, by reason of the fear which would assail the British of being short in both at the moment of the decisive operation. Moreover, in the solution offered by these two general officers the preparatory phase was to consist of three attacks, each from 12 to 20 miles wide; one of these would fall to the British and the two others to us. It is thus seen that the two plans suggested by British headquarters had this point in common—both provided that the French should undertake the larger share in the preparatory offensives.

On February 5th I received an explanation of this attitude of our British friends, whose loyal desire to do their full part was never for a moment in question. General Davidson, in speaking with Colonel des Vallières, Chief of the French Mission, confidentially revealed to what

# BATTLE OF THE SOMME

This is a detailed topographical map of the Normandy region in France. The map shows the coastline of Normandy, with the English Channel to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. Major towns and cities are labeled, including Le Havre, Caen, Bayeux, and Cherbourg. The map also shows the English Channel to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. A scale bar at the bottom right indicates distances in miles (0 to 3).

0 1 2 3



an extent English politics interfered with the conduct of military affairs. "The British Army," he said, "is ready to do its full share, but we cannot cope with the politicians, who, after the Germans, are our worst enemies. If next spring we start out alone in a wearing-down operation, we risk losing from 50,000 to 60,000 men. When the British Government learns of these losses, it will declare that the sacrifices for 1916 have been quite sufficient. Our politicians are willing that Great Britain should carry on this war, but only on condition that the people, upon whom they depend for their living, do not have to bear too much of the burden. Through fear of displeasing the populace, the Government is likely to say, 'Well, that is enough for this year,' and our armies, as a consequence, would not be permitted to undertake any new important offensive."

General Haig, who had offered me his collaboration and that of the British Army without any restrictions, now found himself hampered by this attitude of the British politicians. He told me that General Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had disclosed this situation to him when visiting him at Saint-Omer during the closing days of January, 1916.

However, this difficulty quickly disappeared, though, unfortunately, at our cost; for the battle of Verdun which began on February 21st now intervened, and performed with frightful efficiency the attrition which I had so greatly desired to spare our soldiers.

About this time I also had occasion to observe, and again at our expense, the vicious influence of politics upon military operations. During the course of January, 1916, I got wind of the fact that in very high military quarters amongst the British, an unfavourable opinion was beginning to be formed concerning the spirit and efficiency of the French Army, serious doubt being felt as to whether it was in condition to undertake another offensive. Sir Douglas Haig appeared to share this opinion, by reason of reports coming to him from sources whose origin we could not discover. This not only disturbed but surprised me, above all in view of the magnificent behaviour shown by our armies up to that time, and which, I felt, merited a more just appreciation on the part of our Allies. It was not long before I discovered the explanation of this enigma.

On January 10, 1916, M. Clemenceau, then a Senator, made a visit to Rousbrugge, headquarters of the XXXVI Army Corps. There, in the presence of Captain Reece, an Englishman, liaison officer between the Second Army and the XXXVI Corps, he had given free rein to his imagination, expressing the utmost pessimism concerning the state of morale existing in the French Army, insisting upon the effects of the

enormous losses it had incurred, and winding up by saying that it was utterly incapable of resuming the offensive from now on.

Captain Reece had naturally informed his superiors of these statements, and the latter had attached all the more importance to them in view of the author's prominent position in public life. Some time later Captain Reece unburdened himself on the subject to one of our officers, concluding with these words: "If what M. Clemenceau says is true, his patriotism should have impelled him to hold his tongue; if it is false, the man is beneath contempt."

It was, moreover, a matter of public knowledge that a person of much less importance, M. Boudenott, a Senator from the Pas de Calais, had been spreading similar reports, both in speech and in writing, and this also had come to the knowledge of British G.H.Q.

As all these remarks had been made in a region where French, Belgian and British troops were assembled in large numbers, German agents working there must have found their task made especially easy for them. It was, moreover, inevitable that these pessimistic and unjust remarks had been fully reported to the enemy.

At this time M. Clemenceau was in opposition. Later on, when he came into power, he was able fully to measure the danger that can attend this sort of "gossip." I did what lay in my province to protect the Army from a repetition of such dangerous imprudences; they fully justified in my mind the restrictions I placed upon the visits to the front which political men were constantly making. Moreover, the splendid conduct of our Army during the whole of 1916, the year of Verdun and the Somme, seemed quite sufficient proof that our soldiers deserved something better than such opinions as these, bandied about in the presence of foreigners by ill-informed members of the French Parliament.

On February 14, 1916, Sir Douglas Haig and I at last came to an agreement regarding the general outlines of our plan. A contiguous attack by the French and British was to be undertaken on both sides of the Somme, commencing towards the end of June. As soon as the co-operation of the British was assured and the general plan of action drawn up, I informed the commanders of Army Groups (February 18th) of my intention to endeavour to break through the enemy's line by a general offensive, to be executed by French and British forces along the front held by our Armies of the North. I notified General Foch that for the execution of this plan he would have at his disposal 39 divisions, 3 territorial divisions, and about 1700 heavy guns. These resources, distributed amongst his three armies, should make possible an attack along a front

of some 25 miles; the British attack would prolong this front as far north as Hébuterne, giving a total width of forty miles for the offensive. July 1st was fixed as the date for its opening. When the battle of Verdun started three days later, I had a reserve of 31 divisions behind the front.

I have already said in a preceding chapter that what appeared to me as the most comprehensible reason which could have induced the Germans to undertake their offensive against Verdun was the desire to use up our reserves and thus prevent the French Army from participating in any future offensive along our front. Inversely, the task which I set myself as soon as the battle of Verdun entered into the distinct phase of a war of attrition was to give this defensive operation, so far as regarded our forces, its most economical form.

The agreements made at the Chantilly Conference accorded me the right to request the British to start an attack whose object would be to relieve the pressure now bearing upon Verdun. If I did not take advantage of this provision, it was not because of any vainglorious desire to prove to the world that France was quite capable of accepting alone the challenge thrown down to her by the Germans; indeed, if I had felt that there was danger of a catastrophe, I would certainly have called upon our Allies, and I am sure that they would have promptly answered my appeal; but I knew they were not ready. Neither in munitions, nor in the number of his reserves, nor in the degree of preparation of his troops, was Sir Douglas Haig in a position to undertake any efficient action. To engage the British prematurely by appealing to their spirit of solidarity and their sense of honour was tantamount to inviting repulse in a battle for whose preparation suitable time had not been given. This was precisely what the enemy desired us to do. Moreover, what I have related above touching the influence being exerted by British politicians, furnished sufficient proof that this reasoning was correct. "After we have lost 50,000 or 60,000 men," said Davidson, "the British Army will be permitted to make no further attack between now and the end of the year."

I, therefore, contented myself with asking the British to furnish me with new resources by taking over the front occupied by our Tenth Army. This operation, indeed, had been agreed to in principle by General Haig before the battle of Verdun commenced. And so when on, February 22nd, I asked that this indirect assistance should be given us, the answer was not long in coming. The following day General Haig telegraphed that not only had he given orders immediately to relieve the French 18th Division and later on the XVII Corps, but that it was his intention, in addition, personally to take up in London the despatch of



forces from Egypt. He telephoned me: "I have made arrangements to hasten the relief of the whole of your Tenth Army, and tomorrow I am coming to Chantilly to see you and to place myself entirely at your service." He kept his word. The XVII Corps was relieved on March 4th and the remainder of the Tenth Army on the 14th.

Since the Germans had now abandoned the passive attitude which they had observed along our whole front during 1915, and were offering us battle at Verdun, I decided that I would make this fact serve my own purposes. Verdun must become the cauldron in which the enemy reserves would be melted, while the decisive action would take place later on the Somme. The year 1916 could and should be the year of our victory.

"In view of the capital importance of the battle which the enemy has started," I wrote Haig on March 3rd, "it is indispensable for us to do something more than repulse his attacks. We must *crush* him. That has become the task of both of us, now that the critical moment has arrived."

While I was urging the British to intensify their preparations for the battle of the Somme, by assigning to it every available unit (to which I agreed to add my share by sending them 110 heavy guns), I formed the plan of extending the front of attack of Foch's group of armies up to Hamel, 5 miles southeast of Lassigny. In order to accomplish this, I renounced the secondary attacks which I had formerly prescribed for the other groups of armies, since these operations now became unnecessary.

Unfortunately, our effectives continued to be absorbed by the Verdun battle, no matter what efforts I made to save them; so that on April 26th I was obliged to inform General Foch that, while my intentions had not changed, the resources I was able to place at his disposal had diminished and he would have to envisage shortening his front of attack; this would continue to adjoin that of the British; however, the work of preparation must continue along the whole front originally contemplated.

On May 20th faced by the furious attacks which the enemy now delivered on both sides of the Meuse, I was forced for a second time to warn Foch of a reduction in his forces; I could now give him only 26 divisions and 700 heavy guns. On May 22nd, I informed General Haig of the modification which the struggle then going on at Verdun had entailed in my plans for the Somme. "This battle, which has been raging for three months with unprecedented violence and persistence, has absorbed a large part of our resources in men and matériel. I am, therefore, obliged to cut down considerably the participation of the French armies in the general Allied offensive. The reduction of the means placed at General

Foch's disposal will certainly lead to some modifications in his plan of action; but you can be assured that any changes which he may find necessary will not affect the direct co-operation which the French armies will bring to the action of the British forces north of the Somme.

"General Foch has had to recast entirely his original plan and replace it by an attack of the Sixth Army alone, advancing on both sides of the Somme, joining up with the British Army near Méricourt and limited on the south by the road from Amiens to Péronne. The attack is to be conducted by three corps in the first line, one operating north of the Somme and two south."

The plan as thus proposed was definitely adopted, and it is the one that was executed.

While on the one hand, as has been seen above, General Pétain continued to ask that the battle of the Somme should be opened, so that the pressure on Verdun might be relieved, General Haig, on his side, soon began to offer excellent arguments for delaying these operations. On May 8th, basing his suggestion on the fact that towards the 15th of August the British Army in France would receive a consignment of some 200 heavy guns, he requested that our offensive should be put off until that date.<sup>1</sup>

I could not share this view. To require the French Army to prolong the gigantic struggle in which it was engaged at Verdun, was to play into the hands of the enemy, since in the end we would finish by being incapable of taking part in the operations on the Somme. Moreover, the offensive which the Austrians had opened in the Trentino had assumed disquieting proportions, and the Russians, upon the request of Italy, had decided to advance the date of their attack, which was now fixed for June 4th. But the agreement amongst the Allies of December, 1915, required that the French and British forces should enter into action 15 days after the opening of the Russian attack; therefore, when, on May 26th, I had a conference with General Haig at Beauquesne, I explained this situation to him, referring more especially to the operations of General Alexeieff, Russian Chief of Staff. After listening to my explanation,

<sup>1</sup> During the first three months of 1916, 11 British divisions had been brought to the French front from Egypt. By the middle of April, the British Army in France amounted to 47 divisions, instead of the 36 present at the beginning of the year. However, there were 37 divisions of varying strength and excellence in England.

At this moment an important event took place in London. Breaking with a tradition which until that time had been considered inviolable, the British House of Commons had voted the Law of Conscription (May, 1916).

At the end of June, 7 new British divisions joined Haig's Army, which thus consisted of 54 divisions; 26 of these, instead of the 17 at first contemplated, were to be assigned to the general offensive.

Haig loyally declared that he was in complete agreement with me and that the question should be examined exactly as if there was only one army on the French-British front and that we must all attack simultaneously. He definitely agreed to the date of July 1st for the opening of the Battle of the Somme.

The following incident throws much light on the feeling of confidence which existed between the British Commander-in-Chief and myself. Haig related it to Colonel des Vallières, Chief of the French Mission at British G.H.Q.:

It appears that M. Clemenceau, at that time President of the Senate Military Committee, went to see Sir Douglas at Aire on May 4, 1916. "During his visit, which lasted an hour," said Sir Douglas, "he talked much and in a very interesting way about all sorts of matters. However, I was very much surprised when he suddenly launched this question at me: 'Are you under General Joffre's orders?'"

"Although I did not consider M. Clemenceau entitled to question me on such a point," continued Sir Douglas, "I answered that I was responsible solely to the British Government for the employment of my troops and the conduct of operations; nevertheless, believing as I did that there could not be two commanders-in-chief in the same theatre of operations and that the French and British forces constituted *one single army*, I guided myself absolutely by the directions issued by General Joffre, having complete confidence in him and a high appreciation of the ability of the officers commanding his armies.

"I ended by saying to M. Clemenceau that General Joffre had spoken to me of him in terms of much praise, and I advised him urgently to *go and see* the Commander-in-Chief, for if we expected to achieve victory each one of us must put aside his personal preferences and join together in one common determination to win.

"M. Clemenceau left me, apparently very much satisfied with his interview."

When he reported this conversation to me, Colonel des Vallières added: "General Haig seemed as much pleased at having had an opportunity of reading a lesson of loyalty to M. Clemenceau as he was at being able to emphasize the cordial relations existing between himself and the French Commander-in-Chief."<sup>2</sup>

This interview between M. Clemenceau and General Haig was not without its piquancy; unfortunately, the generous words of the British

<sup>2</sup> Personal file of the Commander-in-Chief, Volume 2, Folder 1, Document 79; letter dated May 8, 1916.

Commander-in-Chief were incapable of doing any good, for I was one of the many men whom M. Clemenceau did not like. The reasons for his ill-will towards me were trivial enough. At the beginning of 1915, if I remember the date correctly, I had removed General Leblois from command of a colonial division because of incapacity. M. Clemenceau came to see me to endeavour to get me to reverse my decision. This I refused to do. Whereupon Clemenceau, now quite beside himself, shouted: "You have dismissed him because he punished an army chaplain." With this he left, and he never forgave me.<sup>8</sup>

On June 21st I sent Generals Haig and Foch each a copy of my instructions defining the object of the first operations and explaining the methods to be pursued in exploiting the earliest successes. These Instructions began by stating my intention of engaging a battle of long duration, whose continuation was expected to wear down the forces of the enemy. This required a schedule to be carefully drawn up governing the arrival of fresh units and laying down a plan for reconstituting exhausted elements.

The strategic end which I had in view was the directing of a mass of manoeuvre against the enemy's lines of communication running through Cambrai, Le Cateau and Maubeuge. The road Bapaume-Cambrai would thus represent the initial axis of our forward movement. The first line to be reached was marked by Miraumont, le Sars, Guinchy, Guillemont, Maurepas, Hem and the plateau of Flaucourt.

As a result of the reductions made in the forces assigned to the French offensive, the principal action was to fall to the British armies, the mission of the French Sixth Army being to support our Allies. For this purpose, our Army was to operate astride the Somme in liaison with the British Fourth Army, the right of its attack extending south of the river and up to the Amiens-Péronne highway; its action south of the Somme was to be limited to securing a foothold on the plateau of Flaucourt, so as to prevent the enemy's artillery in this region from directing a flanking fire against the troops moving north of the river. On the other hand, north of the river, its action, although restricted at the outset by the nature of the ground, was to take on a wider development which would depend upon the progress made by the British; arrangements were to be

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that General Leblois was later on given a command. In October, 1915, he was put at the head of the 57th Division, then leaving for the Near East. Although this officer was one of General Sarrail's friends, the latter had a telegram sent me in October, 1916, by my liaison officer with the Army of the East, reporting the incapacity of General Leblois, whom everybody regarded as very weak. General Leblois was relieved of his command in 1917.

made to so feed this attack as to enable it to push on as far as possible, though always in liaison with the British.

I realized that the development of our offensive north of the Somme would soon bring into action the forces of the Sixth Army, whose task it would be to advance northwards in conjunction with the British Fourth Army, at the same time continuing its occupation of the ground facing east. These two missions ran some risk of being difficult to execute simultaneously; it was for this reason that, on June 24th, I had brought the staff of the Third Army from the Argonne front and placed it at General Foch's disposal. I put General Humbert, commanding the Third Army, in charge of the passive front of the Oise, while General Micheler (Tenth Army) took over all that part of the front where operations were only anticipated in the event of the action developing towards the south. In this way only that portion of the front on which the attack was to take place was left to the Sixth Army.

General Fayolle was destined to play in this battle a rôle of the first importance. When the war broke out he was a brigadier-general on the retired list. He had formerly been a professor at the War College, in charge of the artillery course, and here he had made for himself the reputation of a man of sound common sense, always giving preference to simple solutions. He was profoundly modest, hard-working and conscientious. Having reached the age limit, he had quietly gone into retirement, but on August 13, 1914, he was given command of a reserve division. Here, under difficult circumstances, he and his command had acquitted themselves with much honour, especially during the "Race to the Sea." On June 21, 1915, when I gave General Pétain the Second Army, I placed Fayolle at the head of the XXXIII Corps thus made vacant; then, on February 26, 1916, when General Dubois left the Sixth Army, I gave it to Fayolle. He fully justified these marks of confidence, and on every occasion he displayed, in the command of his army, the qualities I have mentioned above. He saw things clearly and accurately; he was always calm and methodical.

The artillery preparation for the battle commenced on the morning of June 24th. On July 1st the attack was launched: at 7.30 a.m., north of the Somme in conjunction with the British, at 9.30 a.m., south of the Somme. Thanks to the excellent work of the artillery, the infantry everywhere made rapid progress, and, by evening, the whole of the German first position had been carried and the fighting begun on the second; this likewise fell the next morning.

On the British side, the success was less marked. The Germans deliv-

ered a series of counter-attacks in which they reconquered a part of the ground that the British had won at the start. The truth is that the Germans did not believe that the French, just emerging from the Verdun battle, would be capable of starting an offensive on the Somme, although our preparations had certainly not escaped their notice. They had, therefore, taken more precautions along the line facing the British, and this accounts for the more violent reactions which took place on their part of the line. The British also suffered from the fact that their artillerymen were less skilful than ours and their infantrymen less experienced. The result was that they suffered very heavy losses.

By July 10th the task assigned the French Sixth Army had been completely fulfilled; more especially, the plateau of Flaucourt had been captured. This rapid success, above all south of the river, where the enemy had been completely surprised, induced General Foch to make a modification in the development of the battle, animated as he was by the desire to exploit the situation, and fearing as he did that the British attack, disconcerted by its preliminary check, might fail to give the results that had been expected north of the river. On the evening of July 3rd, therefore, he ordered the Sixth Army to be ready to continue its attack *to the south*.

On the 8th, for this part of the battle-field, he conceived a manœuvre outlined as follows: first establish a defensive front facing east along the river; then, protected by this front, direct our attack facing south, and continue the operation in such manner as to take in flank those parts of the enemy's position which still resisted, at the same time attacking these directly with the Tenth Army and the right of the Sixth Army, facing east.

General Micheler, commanding the Tenth Army, received orders on July 10th to make ready for an attack starting from the railway line Amiens-Nesle; he was informed at the same time that his action was to be extended towards the south as reinforcements being sent him arrived. He already had at his disposal 211 heavy guns and 36 pieces of ALGP.<sup>4</sup> I announced to him the approaching arrival of six batteries of 220 millimetre howitzers and two groups of 155's long. However, the Tenth Army was unable to enter the action until July 25th.

The Sixth Army experienced great difficulty in moving forward its artillery, following the infantry's big advance, owing to the torn up state of the ground. General Fayolle, therefore, considered it impossible to resume the attack before July 26th. These long delays caused me con-

<sup>4</sup> Extra heavy long-range guns.—Translator.

siderable anxiety, for I feared they would enable the enemy to re-establish his defences.

Fortunately, the British quickly recovered from the disagreeable impression produced by their incomplete success of July 1st, and on the 10th they made considerable progress; this was renewed on the 14th. It was now possible to resume the French attack north of the Somme; it took place on July 20th, the day fixed by Fayolle. In the course of this the XX Corps reached and passed the railway from Cléry to Combles, capturing 1200 prisoners and considerable matériel. On the other hand, a new attack undertaken the 30th failed completely.

The battle of Verdun and the opening days of the fighting on the Somme resulted in losses which, added to those of the first eighteen months of the war, when the chief part of the burden on the Western front had fallen on us, brought about a disquieting situation in our effectives; on July 19th I sent the Minister of War a letter inviting his attention to this matter. I pointed out that on July 1, 1916, the units on the front were 92,000 men under strength. These units already included 78,000 men of the 1916 class. What remained of this class was insufficient to fill the gaps existing and those which the continuation of the struggle would certainly cause. I requested that the older classes should be called, so as to free the younger ones from the work of constructing defences. In addition to this, I asked that the 1917 class should be sent to the training centres behind the front, where they would replace men belonging to the 1916 class; also that the first steps for enrolling the 1918 class should be taken. I pointed out that in Germany the 1918 class had already been incorporated and rolls of the 1919 class established.

As an offset to this situation, the manufacture of our war material was continuing to make satisfactory progress. I have already written at length on this subject, and I will give here only a few figures to show the immensity of our effort. We now had 2300 batteries in service, as compared with the 720 field batteries and the 160 foot batteries which we had maintained in time of peace. Our daily production in shell had reached the following: 155,000 for the 75 mm. gun; 10,000 special shell, and 65,000 for heavy artillery and ALGP., that is, 200,000 shell of all calibres *daily*. The consumption had naturally followed a similar ascending curve. During the first phase of the battle of the Somme we spared nothing in the way of heavy artillery ammunition, and our expenditure for field artillery slightly exceeded our daily production. Reserve stocks had to be called upon; these furnished daily 9 or 10 lots of 555 for each lot. I should not omit to mention here the altogether remarkable *fine discipline* which

General Fayolle imposed upon his artillery.<sup>5</sup> I cannot say as much for the Tenth Army, and I several times had to ask that its expenditure should be curtailed, for it too often seemed to border on waste.

While this first phase of the battle of the Somme was in progress, a lively incident occurred between the Minister of War and myself.

During the grand manœuvres of 1913, in the course of which I had been obliged to relieve several corps commanders whose incompetence was manifest, General Roques had given proof of very great ability, which was fully confirmed during the first months of the war, when he led the XII Corps with much distinction. So much so that in January, 1915, I gave him the command of the First Army, made available by the promotion of General Dubail to the command of the Eastern Group of Armies. It was while he was discharging these functions that the Government invited Roques to become Minister of War, which post had become vacant through the resignation on March 16th of General Gallieni, at that time seriously ill.<sup>6</sup>

I shall have occasion to refer to General Roques again, when I come to the subject of my connection with politics. For the moment, let it suffice to say that as Minister of War he never took the vigorous stand of a Millerand in dealing with Parliament. It is unnecessary to go into that subject now, but it seems appropriate to relate here an incident which would hardly be worth referring to if it did not illustrate the unceasing struggle it cost me to preserve intact my authority over the Army.

I had been advised by Major Herbillon, my liaison officer with the War Ministry, that the President of the Republic intended to go in a few days to Verdun, and from there to the Somme and that the Minister of War was to accompany him. Now, during previous visits to the front, General Roques had been constantly approached by local commanders with requests or suggestions of various kinds. I gave a typical example in my account of the battle of Verdun, when a report made direct to the Minister of War by General Pétain led the Government to write me a letter in which I was pressed to change my decisions.

These appeals to the Government over my head appeared to me to be extremely harmful to my authority with my subordinates. Therefore, on receiving this communication from Major Herbillon, I wrote a letter to

<sup>5</sup> The relative consumption of ammunition for the Tenth and Sixth Armies on July 15, 1916, was, for the 75 mm. gun, as follows: in the Tenth Army 108,000; in the Sixth Army 60,000. In the Tenth Army, the consumption varied very little, whatever the nature of the operations; whereas in the Sixth Army it was a function of the action then going on.

<sup>6</sup> General Gallieni died May 27, 1916, in a sanatorium at Versailles.



General Roques in which I clearly set forth my point of view. Here are the closing paragraphs:

I hope it will seem to you as it does to me, that all misunderstanding will be avoided if, in reply to requests which may be presented to you, I can personally and on the spot explain what I have done in each particular case and the reasons which have dictated my action.

This is precisely the prerogative of the heavy responsibility which rests upon my shoulders, and it is for this reason that I submit to you my firm intention of accompanying you on your visits.

However, the operations now going on make it impossible for me to leave my headquarters or make any plans not strictly required for the conduct of the battle.

This being the case, I urgently request you to be kind enough temporarily to defer your visit to the front.

The next evening Major Herbillon arrived, bringing me the following letter from the General, written in his own hand:

Paris, July 14, 1916.

My dear Joffre,<sup>7</sup>

Your letter No. 9042 of yesterday surprised and grieved me. You ought to see that if I accept what you propose, and only make visits to the Army when accompanied by you, or renounce such visits when it is impossible for you to go with me, neither the Government nor Parliament would consent to what they would consider as a complete abdication on my part;—and that would be the end of everything.

That, in a word, is the situation; you have got to understand and accept it. Otherwise, we are embarking on a dangerous voyage.

I do not think that during my visits I have ever done anything which tended to diminish your authority, which not only I but the Government desire to support.

On the other hand, it is to your interest that I continue as Minister of War. We can accomplish a great deal together, provided that each properly carries out his own task. *This condition is the dominating factor—you must not forget it—in any vote of confidence by either the Senate or the Chamber.* If it is not realized, our boat will be upset and some of us drowned before two months are over. Therefore, this condition has got to be met.

The best thing would be for you to ask me to send you back your letter. In that way it would no longer exist. Otherwise I will be obliged to answer you officially, and I can only do so along the lines that I have just indicated.

As to my trip of Sunday and Monday with the President of the Republic, it cannot be put off, even if you find it impossible to accompany us.

Yours ever

ROQUES.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Throughout this letter General Roques addresses Marshal Joffre as "tu." Nothing could be more indicative of personal intimacy or more clearly show the strictly personal nature of the communication.—Translator.

<sup>8</sup> Personal file of the Commander-in-Chief, Volume 2, Folder 3, Document 95.

On receiving this letter, I had a telephone message sent to the Minister of War requesting him to come to see me at my headquarters. He arrived at 9.30 a.m. on the 15th. He was in a very bad humour. He told me that my letter had created a most unfortunate impression in Paris, and that it was upon the advice of the President of the Republic that he had brought it back to me, with the urgent request that I should withdraw it.

After listening to him patiently, I explained my own point of view. In the matter under discussion, I told him, there were two questions, one of principle and one of its application.

As to the question of principle, I maintained my opinion, namely, that nothing good could come of the Government's going behind my back and over my head, to gather opinions, listen to complaints or entertain requests; this was the reason why I asked that each time the President or the Minister of War visited the zone of the armies, he should be accompanied by me or my chief of staff.

In application of this principle, I requested the Minister of War to have the journey contemplated by the President postponed until such time as it was possible for me to accompany him.

After a good deal of heated discussion, Roques finally realized that I had not yet recovered from the recent incident brought about by the reports which General Pétain had made to him towards the end of the preceding month, and he admitted that occurrences such as these were bound to be injurious to the conduct of operations. The matter was, therefore, arranged in the way I had requested: it was decided that the President and the Minister would always be accompanied by me or my delegate whenever they made a visit to the front.

Regarding the case now in point, it was agreed that the programme of the trip to Verdun and to the Somme would be carried out, and, as General de Castelnau was in the eastern part of the line, I telegraphed him to go immediately to Verdun and place himself at the orders of the President. Roques departed, somewhat calmed down. But he left me my letter.

The account of this incident might be fittingly closed with an anecdote from the Italian front. On October 19th of that year I learned that relations between General Cadorna, Chief of Staff of the Italian Armies, and Signor Bissolatti were very much strained, although I forget what the reasons were for this disagreement; however, as it was reported to me, General Cadorna had *forbidden* the Minister of War to enter the zone of the Italian armies.

At 8 p.m. on July 17th General de Castelnau returned to headquarters

at Chantilly from Verdun where, as I have just said, he had been in attendance on the President. A few minutes afterwards, M. Poincaré arrived with General Roques. We then started together for Amiens in the President's train. I first took him to see General Foch at Dury. I could see that politics were giving M. Poincaré considerable concern and that he saw with much irritation the rise of M. Clemenceau's star in the political firmament; for the President dreaded the violence of his character. "No Ministry could last," he said, "with that man at its head."

We next went to see General Fayolle at Méricourt. Returning, we came upon a territorial regiment of infantry (the 117th), which passed in good style before the President, having the air of old soldiers well commanded. I also pointed out Dampierre to M. Poincaré as an example of what a village looked like when it had been properly "treated" by our artillery preparation. Nothing but vague traces remained of this unfortunate village. One pile of stones, a little higher than the rest, marked where the church had stood. We then went to see a battery of 16-inch guns.

This visit to the Somme evidently made a good impression on the President. He told me that he was much impressed by the difference of "temperature" between the Verdun troops and those on the Somme, as they had appeared to him on two successive days. On the Somme, both staff and troops seemed to exhale an air of confidence and satisfaction, while at Verdun he got the impression of great weariness—an air of resignation—which gave him much concern. Replying to his questions, one of the men at Verdun had answered: "We'd just as lief be somewhere else." He also got the impression that discipline was somewhat slack. He had happened on a cantonment of troops belonging to Mordrelle's division (the 7th), where the men were slightly intoxicated, and the spectacle had left a very bad impression on him. This doubtless was the reason why the march past of the old soldiers of the 117th Regiment had caused him such a happy surprise, which he did not attempt to conceal.

These two visits had given the President an opportunity of comparing the depressing effects of a long defensive with the happy influence of a successful offensive.

On my return to Chantilly during the evening of July 17th, General Pellé came to report a conversation which he had just had with Colonel Rudeanu, sent to France officially for the purpose of discussing the question of Roumanian intervention. According to information furnished by this officer, the Roumanian Government had decided to enter the war on our side. Their offensive would begin on August 8th, when the harvest was over. The difficulties with Russia, which had for so long a time

delayed Roumania's decision, now seemed to be straightened out. I will explain further on why the intervention of this new Ally, full of promise though it seemed, presented, at the same time, very considerable risks.

To return now to our operations. As I have just explained, of the last two attacks made at the end of July, that of the 20th had partially succeeded, that of the 30th had entirely broken down. The cause of this latter failure lay for great part in the difficulties encountered by the Sixth Army in the course of the preparation of the offensive. Indeed, it appeared wholly illogical that General Fayolle should continue to direct the battle on both theatres of operations, the one north and the one south of the Somme, since the action had become each day more and more divergent.

On July 31st I sent for Foch to come to Chantilly. I recalled to him that the fundamental idea of our offensive was to "*support the British forces operating on the north*, our offensive on the south remaining secondary and always subordinate to the results obtained on the north." In consequence, I had decided that the boundary between the Sixth and Tenth Armies must be moved to the north, so that General Micheler would command the operations south of the river, while General Fayolle retained on this shore only the zone from which his artillery could take in reverse the German defences on the north bank.

I next occupied myself with stimulating the British offensive, which, little by little, had become resolved into a series of disconnected actions, both costly and unprofitable.<sup>9</sup>

During the whole month of August I frequently called Sir Douglas Haig's attention to the necessity of putting more vigour and continuity into our attacks. The Russian offensive was progressing favourably, though at the price of serious losses, and it was important not to allow our Allies in the East to lose their momentum. It became our task to make sure that the enemy could not withdraw forces from our front and move them to the Eastern theatre. If we succeeded in doing this, there was reason to hope that the Eastern front would soon give way under the blows of the Russians.

The latter indeed were sending us impressive figures. From July 4th, when their offensive began, to July 31st, they had taken prisoner 335,000 Germans (including 6000 officers) and 461 guns; from the 16th to the 28th of July, 39,000 men, 340 officers and 49 guns; on the 28th and 29th of

<sup>9</sup> On July 19th, the French Sixth Army counted 26,000 sick and wounded, including those in field hospitals. On the same date the British evacuations amounted to 90,000 men.

On August 9th, the British losses since the beginning of the Somme battle amounted to 117,000 men evacuated, not including the killed; 192,000 men had been received as reinforcements.

July, 32,000 men, 650 officers, 100 guns: a total of 400,000 men captured from the German Army in the East. As the Austrians did not fight so well and surrendered much more readily than did their allies, it could be estimated that the Central Powers, since the 4th of June, had lost to the Russians in killed, wounded and prisoners more than 1,000,000 men. And now, as I have just related, Roumania was preparing to put 550,000 fresh troops into the struggle on the Russian side.

On August 7th the Italians had attacked on the Isonzo and had won an important victory. The bridge-head of Gorizia had been carried, and on the 9th Colonel de Gondrécourt, my liaison officer with the Italian Army, announced that the Italians had already taken 14,000 prisoners. I hastened to send my congratulations to General Cadorna, so as to show him the great importance that I attached to the efforts of his army in thus bringing closer the hour of common victory.

In short, the plan whose adoption by the Allies I had secured at the close of 1915 was now bearing fruit. Everywhere, except in the Near East, our forces were dealing the enemy most formidable blows; this was no moment, therefore, for loosening the grip in which we held him on the Western front.

Sir Douglas Haig was too intelligent a man and too loyal a soldier not to understand my appeals, but the execution of his intentions was beset by obstacles which it became my lot to aid in removing. The British Commander-in-Chief was somewhat at a loss in the face of the difficult task, new for him and for his staff, of conducting a long-continued battle involving a group of several armies. It must not be forgotten that when the war started the Expeditionary Force brought to France by Sir John French consisted of only 70,000 men, whereas in the middle of August, 1916, General Haig had under his orders 1,439,000 soldiers, of whom 1,200,000 were combatants. To command this army, generals, colonels, staffs had to be improvised, and it can be readily understood how heavily this great mass rested upon the Commander-in-Chief. This fact furnishes the explanation of his willingness to permit the gradual decentralization of the battle, until it finally became reduced to a series of separate actions, each directed by corps and division commanders. To overcome this situation it was essential to bring our Allies back to one concerted operation. I wrote to Haig on these lines on August 11th and had the letter delivered to him by General des Vallières.

Then, there were the politicians. The British had to suffer as we did from the many delays they caused—the characteristic remarks of General Davidson to General des Vallières on this subject will be recalled—and I

began to ask myself with some anxiety whether the heavy losses which they had sustained since the opening of July was not likely to provoke some sudden intervention from across the Channel.

But in one quarter, at least, I had a pleasant surprise. On the morning of August 12th I went to Val Vion with the President of the Republic for the purpose of meeting King George, who was coming to France on a visit to his armies. At half-past twelve we reached Doullens, where we breakfasted with His Majesty. Haig and Foch were present. After luncheon the King had a conference with the President; he then accorded me a private audience, at which General Haig assisted. Later on he received General Foch.

The King was particularly gracious in his remarks, declaring that he personally and all his countrymen had the fullest confidence in me. He said that it was the desire of the whole British nation that the struggle should be vigorously continued and that its direction remain in my hands. The King's whole attitude was a flat contradiction of the rumour which had reached us that the British offensive on the Somme had been slowed down because of the Government's intervention.

I then had a talk with Haig. He had that morning received my letter from General des Vallières, and he expressed himself as in full agreement with all I had written, more especially concerning the principle of a close co-ordination of the British and French efforts; this was to be secured by having me fix the dates and objectives for the attacks.

During the course of this journey, M. Poincaré confided in me something which confirmed my impression that we were nearer to victory than we thought. The President had recently had a visit from Monseigneur Duchesne, his colleague of the *Académie Française*, who had just returned from Rome. The Pope had told Monseigneur Duchesne that the situation of Austria was now so precarious that before the year was over the Central Powers would be obliged to ask for an armistice. In telling me this, M. Poincaré suggested that I should immediately study what military conditions should be exacted in case of an armistice.<sup>10</sup> In order not to interrupt the recital of events, I will give in another place the plan which I had drawn up by my staff.

To return to the operations. Full agreement being established with Sir Douglas Haig, we now prepared for a vast general offensive which was to start on August 30th along a front of about 20 miles, extended some seven miles farther to the left by the British right wing. This attack was to be pushed deep enough into the enemy's lines to effect their serious

<sup>10</sup> See Part IV, Chapter 4, page 500, Plans for the Year 1917.

disorganization. Bad weather obliged us to postpone this operation to September 3rd, for the Sixth Army and the British, and to September 4th for the Tenth Army.

North of the Somme, Fayolle's army reached the road Combles-Cléry on the evening of the 3rd. Cléry was taken the next morning, and our gains were increased the following day. They were less, however, than we had reason to hope for, since the check experienced by our Allies hampered the progress of the French left.

In the Tenth Army, the attack opened at 2 o'clock on September 4th. We captured Chilly, the western part of the Bois de Chaulnes, Vermandovillers and Soyécourt; Deniecourt was surrounded; 2100 prisoners were taken.

These attacks had surprised the enemy at the moment reliefs were taking place, and the success ought to have been followed up immediately; but the moving up of the artillery and the relief of exhausted troops delayed the resumption of the offensive until September 12th. On that day five French divisions attacked north of the Somme, marking a new advance which carried us up to Bouchavesnes. On the 15th and 16th it was the turn of the English. They attacked on an 8 mile front and penetrated deeply into the enemy lines. Part of their success was due to the use of tanks, which were a terrifying surprise to the enemy. General Haig had showed me these new engines on September 3rd, during a visit which I made to him at Beauquesne.

On September 25th, a fresh operation started on the front of the Sixth Army, acting in liaison with the British. This manœuvre of the French left combined with that of the British right brought about the fall of the little town of Combles and the villages of Rancourt and Frégicourt.

South of the Somme, the Tenth Army, on the 14th, attacked along the front lying between Chilly and Barleux. It captured at one bound Chilly and Soyécourt, completing its success the following days by taking Vermandovillers, Deniecourt, Berny-en-Santerre, with over 1000 prisoners.

To emphasize the results obtained in this new phase of the battle, I wrote to General Haig on September 17th thanking him for the effective collaboration of his army; on the 29th I addressed to the French Sixth and Tenth Armies General Order No. 66, congratulating them upon their work and their success. During this period of the offensive I had devoted myself to intensifying the activity of the British and maintaining that of the French, especially endeavouring to keep Fayolle's army in close collaboration with our Allies.

On September 7th I made a visit to the Somme—as a matter of fact

I went there very often—for the purpose of removing some misapprehensions which had arisen. I told Fayolle all the confidence I had in him, but I let him understand that it was altogether legitimate for the commander of the group of armies to which his force belonged to intervene for the purpose of co-ordinating the operations; and that while Foch must keep in mind the difficulties which he, Fayolle, was encountering, he himself ought to appreciate the importance of having them rapidly surmounted, so that the enemy would have no time in which to recover himself.

The fears which the operations of our Eastern Allies had inspired in me, in spite of the brilliant hopes to which they had justly given rise, now commenced to take form. The Roumanians had declared war against Austria on August 28th<sup>11</sup> and they had immediately undertaken the invasion of Transylvania. But, for reasons which I will give later on, our new Allies immediately found themselves placed in a difficult situation. Moreover, their entrance into the campaign, which should have been the signal for intensifying the Russian offensive, coincided, on the contrary, with a period of hesitation which seemed to have a close connection with the appointment to office of M. Sturmer. He had just replaced M. Sazonoff, the best Minister that the unfortunate Nicholas ever had during the war and the most loyal towards the Allies.

Now it was absolutely essential that all the efforts made by the Entente, and especially by France, during this terrible year of 1916 should not have been made in vain, that there should be no diminution in the action on all the Allied fronts. I have already stated that symptoms of weakness had been observed amongst our enemies; these now multiplied and took more definite form. Conflicts had arisen between Berlin and Sofia, no less grave than those between the Bulgarians and the Austrians, between Falkenhayn and von Conrad. We knew that Austria was at the end of her tether, and the bloody revolts in Germany proved how great were the sufferings of our principal enemy. As for the morale of the German troops that faced us, that it had been lowered was plainly visible. The number of prisoners we took, the number of officers that surrendered, as well as their attitude, all indicated that weariness and discouragement which are the sure precursors of defeat.

However, if our efforts were to be kept up, it was evident that, so far as the French front was concerned, it must be the British who would have to take the lion's share. I have already referred to the anxiety which the state of our effectives caused me. Our losses at Verdun between

<sup>11</sup> Italy had finally declared war against Germany the same day.



February 21st and August 15th amounted to 7317 officers and 299,000 men.<sup>12</sup> From July 1st to September 15th, the Somme had cost us, in round figures, 80,000 men. On September 10th I received a memorandum from General Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, as to the line which he thought should be pursued by the Coalition; in it he arrived at the conclusion that the offensive on the Western front should be kept up as long as the weather permitted. Catching the ball on the rebound, I telegraphed him the next morning that while I fully agreed, I counted above all on the British Army for the intensification of our efforts, and I suggested to him that the British front should be extended so as to give some relief to the exhausted French troops.

I knew that I was asking fresh sacrifices of an army which had already lost 250,000 men and 12,000 officers on the Somme; but I thought that these sacrifices might with justice be exacted of an army which now had in France a million and a half men. In the matter of matériel, the British Army was also making great progress. The factories were delivering 1,200,000 shell a week and our Allies had found it possible to fire on the Somme, between July 1st and September 15th, in the neighbourhood of 14,000,000 rounds.

On September 15th I learned with much grief of the death of my former aide-de-camp, Major de Galbert, killed on the 13th, near Bouchavesnes, at the head of the 27th Battalion of Chasseurs. He was an officer whose intelligence, conscientiousness and sense of duty were unsurpassed, and his death was a great loss to me and to the Army. I sent my aide-de-camp to express my profound sympathy to his widow.

On September 19th I wrote to the Ministry of War requesting that in conformity with the law of March 13, 1875, General Foch should be maintained in active service, regardless of the age limit.

General Roques was uncompromisingly opposed to this suggestion, not considering that any exceptional recompense should be granted at this time. In my opinion, it was not so much a question of recompense, although this was entirely merited, as of the interest we had in preserving for the country the services of such an eminent soldier. When the question which I had raised in my letter came up for discussion before the Cabinet,

<sup>12</sup> The details are as follows: 45,000 killed, 163,000 wounded, 91,000 missing; total 299,000. Since the beginning of 1916 the losses in the French Army in killed, wounded and sick thus amounted to a figure not much short of 400,000 men. The battle of the Somme was not yet finished, and I will explain presently how we were shortly to be obliged to undertake new offensives at Verdun, with the object of re-establishing the situation there. These new offensives, however well conducted they might be, would inevitably cause us still further losses.

Mn. Bourgeois, Doumergue, Albert Thomas and de Freycinet energetically opposed the attitude taken by the Minister of War. General Pellé was to a considerable degree responsible for this exhibition of sentiment in favour of General Foch, and his action had all the greater merit in that had Foch been placed upon the retired list, the vacancy thus created amongst the major-generals would have fallen to him, since it was my intention to promote him on the first occasion. But Pellé was not the sort of man to be influenced by any such considerations, and on various occasions he had seized the opportunity of speaking to members of the Cabinet in favour of Foch. On September 26th the Council adopted my proposal that Foch should be maintained on the active list regardless of the age limit. When I no longer commanded the army, Pellé, a victim of the independence of his character and of having been my principal assistant, was made to wait a long time for his promotion. It was men such as these that were being accused of ambition.

By the end of September the French and British armies had advanced their front to a line running as follows: north of the Somme: the northern outskirts of Thiepval, Courcellette, Eaucourt l'Abbaye, Gueudecourt, the eastern edge of Les Bœufs and Morval, Frégicourt, the western outskirts of Saint-Pierre-Waast, hill 130 to the southeast of Bouchavesnes, hill 76 to the east of Cléry-sur-Somme; south of the Somme: La Maisonette, the western outskirts of Barleux, the southern edges of Berny-en-Santerre, Denicourt, Soyécourt, and the eastern outskirts of Vermandovillers and Chilly. Thus in two months' fighting we had realized an average advance of six miles, and the front of attack had widened from 17 to 34 miles.

General Haig's principal objective during the month of September had been to reach the heights around Les Bœufs and Morval, at the same time that the French Sixth Army was pushing towards Sailly-Saillisel. The whole British effort had been confined to the right of their Fourth Army. The left of this army and the Reserve Army had in view only secondary and near-by objectives, their intention being merely to make sure of the possession of the Pozières heights and the Bois des Foursaux. One immediate advantage resulting from these tactics was that, at the conclusion of the battle of the Somme, our Allies would be on the high ground and so would be able to install themselves for the winter in favourable positions.

However, following the request that I made on September 12th, General Haig gave a wider scope to the attacks of his armies. The ease with which Courcellette and Martinpuich had been taken, spurred him to push on farther towards the north. The operations of September 25th and 26th

had in view the preparation of a movement in the direction of Bapaume, which was the first distant objective that I had indicated in my initial Instruction. The Reserve Army seized Thiepval and the heights west and northwest of Courcellette; the left of the Fourth Army effected an advance towards Eaucourt-l'Abbaye and northwest of Gueudecourt.

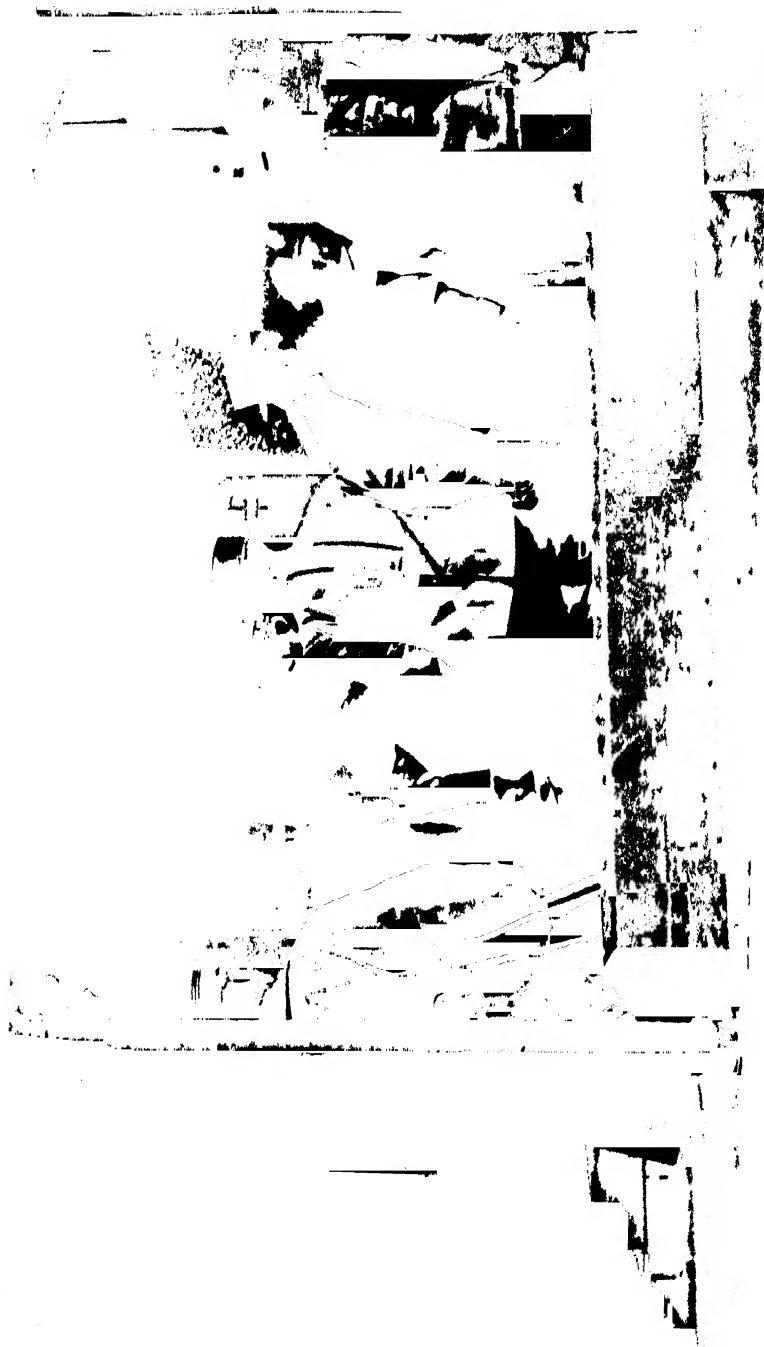
Being already prepared to push his effort towards the north, General Haig immediately fell in with the indications I sent him on September 23rd, prescribing as distant objectives Achiet-le-Grand, Bapaume and Bertincourt.

The result was that during the succeeding operation the principal effort of the British became henceforth distinctly oriented towards the north, being pursued simultaneously by the Reserve Army and most of the Fourth Army, the right wing of the latter continuing its progress to the northeast. However, this advance of our Allies towards the north had to be covered on its right by the action of our Sixth Army, which pushed forward in the direction of Sailly-Saillisel, le Mesnil-en-Arrouais and Bertincourt, at the same time that it covered itself towards the east along the Tortille, east and south of Bouchavesnes. Meanwhile the Tenth Army, although now reduced solely to its own resources, kept up the action. Its attacks were echeloned in time and space so as to reach the line marked by Chaulnes, Pressoire, Gomicourt, Générmont and the wood of Fresnes, the object being to reduce its front and improve its communications, by freeing more and more of the road between Amiens and Péronne.

This was the situation when a new phase of the battle opened in October. The Sixth Army attacked on the 7th, 12th, 13th, 15th and 18th. It captured Sailly-Saillisel, but the Bois de Saint-Pierre-Waast, not being out-flanked sufficiently, continued to resist.

South of the Somme, the Tenth Army, although delayed by bad weather, had a distinct success in well-prepared attacks. The XXI Corps, commanded by General Maistre, captured Ablaincourt with astonishing ease, the battalion which took this village having had only two men wounded, while the enemy left in our hands 1200 prisoners. On the 14th a new attack, delayed as had been that on the 10th by downpours of rain, succeeded completely. Générmont and the Bois de Fresnes were taken and all the objectives were reached; the enemy here lost another 1000 prisoners. On the 16th, 18th, 21st and 22nd of October, a series of small attacks followed one another without great results.

Notwithstanding these successes, the battle of the Somme now gradually slowed down in spite of all my efforts. The days had become too short for good offensive work, a constant haze interfered with our aircraft and



GENERAL JOFFRE LEAVING HEADQUARTERS



artillery, whereas the long nights favoured the construction of defences by the enemy. But, above all, the Germans had inaugurated a new system of tactics, which marked the arrival of Hindenburg and his Quarter-master-General, Ludendorff, at the head of the German armies. Instead of the defence being localized in trenches defended to the last extremity and against which our artillery could direct a murderous fire, the German infantry was now distributed in depth, and it put up a vigorous resistance from scattered shell holes in which nests of machine guns were hidden. When we made an attack, the enemy lost ground, it is true; but this had small importance in his eyes, for he yielded very little of it, and above all he managed to reduce to a minimum his losses in men.

The fragmentary form too often taken on by our attacks against limited objectives favoured these economical tactics of the Germans. I, therefore, addressed an Instruction to General Foch on October 16th in which I pointed out to him the need of returning to the methods which had brought us such brilliant successes at the beginning of July, notably when we had conquered the plateau of Flaucourt south of the Somme in a single bound; we must return to attacks pursued along wide fronts with the object of conquering all the objectives which our artillery could reach and pushing home any success attained.

At the same time I wrote to Sir Douglas Haig, "if we really wish to profit by what we have already accomplished, we must give to our present operations a more decisive form." Again on October 19th, I wrote "I consider it absolutely necessary that wide and deep offensive operations should be undertaken without delay in the direction of Achiet-le-Grand, Bapaume and Bertincourt."

Unfortunately, a number of indications went to show that the British effort was on the point of diminishing more and more. Already an attack projected for October 22nd had been so reduced by a series of restrictions that its execution now appeared problematical. Then, on October 31st, General Haig requested me to inform him as to my intentions for 1917.

They were very simple. Continue the battle, but in a form long drawn out, in the region of the Somme, where our ascendancy over the enemy was assured, by making frequent attacks with limited objectives; this would leave the Germans under the impression that the struggle here was not finished. In this way, reach the month of February or March, 1917, and then undertake the decisive battle which would be the completion of the one we had waged in 1916.

I conceived this battle of the spring of 1917 under the following form: French offensive operations carried on between the Somme and the Oise

with three armies, the Sixth, the Tenth and the Third; British operations between Arras and the neighbourhood of Bapaume. The Allied attacks at the start would be separated by a passive front which our advance would soon render untenable.

These plans were communicated by my assistant chief of staff in charge of operations to General Davidson, chief of operations at British G.H.Q., and they seemed to coincide with General Haig's ideas. At least, that was the impression I received on October 23rd during a visit I made him at Beauquesne. He promised me that his army would actively continue its offensive on the Somme throughout the winter.

But, at the same moment, General des Vallières brought me a very different story. According to him, a persistent rumour was spreading amongst the staffs that the British forces were about to reduce their activity to a minimum and that the winter would be employed in re-organizing, improving training and accumulating munitions, so that when the year 1917 opened they would be fully ready for work.

In any case, on November 4th, the eve of the day when the British XIV Corps was to make an attack on Le Transloy in conjunction with the French Sixth Army, General des Vallières was informed by General Haig's chief of staff that the British Fourth Army was not in a condition to participate in the attack of the French Sixth Army on the day fixed, and that it was impossible to say at what moment it could be ready to carry out the programme agreed upon.

This seemed to confirm the rumours which des Vallières had heard, and soon afterwards whatever illusions still remained to me were destroyed. During a conference held at Querrieu between Generals Haig and Foch, the latter was officially told that the operations of the British Fourth Army for the 5th of November would be reduced to the attack of two battalions. Foch arrived at my headquarters on the 4th and warned me that the British from now on renounced making any attack. To avoid any possible doubt, on the 7th I sent Colonel Renouard, chief of my Operations Bureau, to British G.H.Q. Here General Davidson explained to him why it was impossible for the British armies to take any active part in the projected operations. He alleged the exhaustion of the troops, their enormous losses,<sup>13</sup> the lack of fresh units for relieving those worn out, persistent bad weather, difficulties of the ground, energetic reactions on the part of the enemy. Moreover, the British Commander-in-

<sup>13</sup> Since July 1st the British had lost in round numbers 500,000 men, an enormous figure when it is remembered that the battle of Verdun had cost us 320,000 men and the Somme 170,000—a smaller total than the British losses during a much shorter period which, above all, gave less important results.

Chief was now making arrangements to relieve the left of the French armies on the Somme, as I had requested, and this relief, diminishing his reserves as it did, constituted another reason for his renouncing all offensive action.<sup>14</sup> What Davidson did not tell Renouard was the agitation reigning in British political circles. Sir Douglas Haig was at this moment being considerably criticized. He was accused of sacrificing his men too freely and of having failed to win the campaign of 1916. It was stated that Mr. Winston Churchill, who at the outbreak of the war had been First Lord of the Admiralty, was making efforts to re-enter the Cabinet and that his return to power would be the signal for drastic changes in the High Command.

In Government circles in London there had arisen two conceptions as to how the war should be conducted. While the majority of the Cabinet considered that a solution should be sought on the Western front, there was a minority composed of the most important members of the Government—Mr. Asquith, Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Edward Grey—who believed that the principal effort should be made in the Near East.

Sir Douglas Haig had to shape his course through this rock-strewn sea, and his task was probably no easier than mine. Although he was not always in agreement with General Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, these two men were now brought together through their common antipathy to Lloyd George, whom Robertson facetiously called "Napoleon." Both of them did all they could to convince the Cabinet that the war would be won on the Western front, as I had all along maintained.

Be all that as it may, during the month of November the battle of the Somme slowly died away. It was not in my power to force our Allies to continue in spite of themselves, and it was equally impossible for me to pursue the battle with French forces alone; for they more than any others had earned the right to a rest.

I was, therefore, obliged to bow before a necessity which for a time saved our enemy from complete defeat; but if our victory still remained unfinished, I hoped at least to complete it in the spring of 1917. In the pages which I shall devote to my plans for 1917<sup>15</sup> I will relate how I expected to gain *on the Somme* that victory which politics and the winter—the one striking at my rear and the other closing down on my front—had interrupted. However, in December, 1916, French politics brought about

<sup>14</sup> This relief began during the early days of December.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 4.



a crisis in our High Command which, occurring at a decisive moment, arrived in time once more to save the Germans.

#### THE OPERATIONS ON THE VERDUN FRONT FROM JULY 1, 1916

The Franco-British offensive launched on the Somme on July 1st did not have the immediate effect of stopping the German assaults upon Verdun. In fact, on July 11th and 12th, they made a heavy attack in the sector of Thiaumont-Souville. However, from this moment the initiative passed to the French Second Army on this part of the front, since the Crown Prince could now feed his attacks only with forces taken from defensive sectors along his line between the Argonne and the Moselle. On July 12th, I addressed a note to General Pétain, commanding the Centre Group of Armies, in which I prescribed the mission of the French Second Army. I informed him that while I agreed with his opinion that it was imperative to reconquer a series of strong points on both banks of the Meuse, whose possession was indispensable for the support of our lines of resistance, nevertheless, he would have to depend for this purpose upon very limited resources; therefore, he must space his attacks in their order of urgency, the right bank of the river, with the pocket formed between Fleury and the Thiaumont redoubt, being the first to receive attention. At the same time, these operations must not lead him to discontinue the construction of defensive works, which would enable him to reduce the numbers of troops holding the defensive parts of the front, and so increase the forces at his disposal for his offensive operations.

Immediately after the German attack of July 11th, General Nivelle gave orders to General Mangin, who commanded the Souville sector, to disengage the Souville Fort at once, and retake the village of Fleury. The attacks undertaken on July 15th and 16th brought us to a line 500 yards south of the road leading from Fleury to the Thiaumont redoubt. Then, renouncing all general attacks, Mangin, in execution of Nivelle's orders, undertook a series of partial offensives, with the purpose of reaching the line we had occupied before the attack of June 23rd. This line was marked by the Thiaumont redoubt, the village of Fleury, Les Fontaines redoubt (in the Bois de Vaux-Chapitre) and the Chênois quarry.

Between July 24th and August 5th, in spite of violent counter-attacks on the part of the Germans, which we repulsed on August 1st and 5th, our troops succeeded in reducing the salient of Les Vignes, south of Thiaumont, and establishing themselves in the immediate vicinity of Fleury; however, they could not keep possession of the village of Fleury,

which they had entered on the 3rd. During this fighting we took some 3000 prisoners.

On July 28th, taking advantage of a pause in the battle of the Somme, I made a visit to the Fourth and Second Armies, which I had not seen for some time. I wanted to show these gallant troops that if they no longer occupied the centre of the stage they were none the less the object of my solicitude and admiration. I left Chantilly on the evening of the 27th, accompanied only by my two aides-de-camp, Majors Moyrand and Thouzelier.

At half-past seven the next morning I had a talk with General Pétain at his headquarters at Nettancourt; at 8 I left for Souilly, where I found General Nivelle, who accompanied me during the rest of my tour. We first went to Dugny, where the commanders of the groups on the right bank had been assembled: Paulinier, Lebrun, Baret and Mangin. Upon Nivelle's recommendation I decided that Mangin, who commanded the most dangerous sector and in whom I had the fullest confidence, should be kept where he was, although I had considered giving this command to General Grossetti and sending Mangin with his staff to Fayolle. Fayolle accepted this change with good grace, recognizing as he did the advantages accruing from the profound knowledge which Mangin had now acquired of his sector at Verdun. I, therefore, notified the latter of my decision, adding how much I counted upon him.

I then explained the general situation to the group commanders. "We have now got the enemy by the throat," I said in substance, "and my orders to all of you are not to let him go." After listening to the various requests which these officers had to lay before me, I asked them to send me any exceptional recommendations for the Legion of Honour which they might have to make in favour of their privates and non-commissioned officers. I considered that these rewards would help in restoring to its proper pitch the morale of the men fighting at Verdun and which the terrible nature of the struggle had somewhat affected.

During the afternoon I saw Generals Deletoille at Rampont, de Maud'huy at Ville-sur-Cousance, Hallouin at Rarecourt; these commanded the sectors on the left bank. The impression of relief was everywhere manifest in the various staffs. All recognized that the Somme offensive had produced its effect. The enemy's artillery fire had greatly diminished since July 12th, and was now "normal" except in the Froide Terre-la Laufée sector, where it continued to be very heavy. General Deletoille told me that on some days he had no losses whatever in his sector, and as a consequence the organization of the ground could be

effected under excellent conditions. He considered that the left bank was now firmly held with ample bomb-proofs. He also confirmed the fact that the Germans had withdrawn some of their heavy artillery. Everywhere, except at Souville, our troops were no longer subjected to the fire of large calibre shells; even at Souville, some of the German heavy guns had been replaced by Russian pieces. All of these facts led General Nivelle and the sector commanders to agree that they could return to me some of the heavy artillery, as well as a few divisions which no longer appeared indispensable.

Towards the close of the afternoon I went to Sainte-Menehould, General Hirschauer's headquarters. Here I saw not only Hirschauer, but General Gouraud, commanding the Fourth Army, and General Dalstein; I also passed in review a portion of the 35th Division. During the evening, as I was leaving, I learned of the new successes obtained by the Russians, including the fall of Brody.

My tour gave me an intense satisfaction, all the greater since the President of the Republic, during a visit to Verdun which I have mentioned above, came back with a rather bad impression. I was extremely pleased with General Nivelle and I shall have occasion later on more fully to express the high opinion in which I held him.

During my absence, MM. Doumer and Gervais had come to Chantilly, on July 28th, to *verify* our effectives. These gentlemen expressed the wish to visit the I Colonial Corps in order to study this question on the spot. General de Castelnau told them that he could not take the responsibility of sending members of Parliament to points of such danger, and he only authorized them to visit the command post of the I Colonial Corps. This excited the ire of M. Doumer, who answered: "When I address myself directly to the Army, I get everything I want; when, for the first time, I ask something from G.H.Q. . . . !"

The next time I went to Verdun it was under circumstances which merit being described. The Government had decided to confer the Legion of Honour on the town. The ceremony was to be surrounded with considerable *éclat*, and in order to mark before the entire world the services which the heroes of Verdun had rendered to all the Allies, it had been arranged that the Legion of Honour would be bestowed at the same time as the Cross of St. George, awarded the city by the Czar of Russia. The Prime Minister, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of War were all to attend, and the President of the Republic was to make a speech. I was naturally invited to this ceremony, the date for which was fixed for August 31st.

At 8 o'clock on the evening of the 30th, just as I was getting ready to leave, Colonel Pénelon telephoned to inform me that the ceremony had been countermanded; the next morning he explained to me in person the reasons. These seemed a little surprising. It appears that M. Charles Humbert, Senator from the Meuse, had gone to see M. Malvy, Minister of the Interior, and during this visit he had depicted in very dark colours the precarious condition of the defences of Verdun. He stated that I had taken so many troops and so many guns from the forces defending the city, that a catastrophe could happen at any moment. The Germans had only to make an attack for the place to fall.

M. Malvy was much disturbed by the thought that the Government was about to celebrate the heroic defence of a fortress whose immediate fall M. Charles Humbert was predicting, and he proceeded at once to inform the President. This is what had brought about the countermanding of the ceremony. Truth requires it to be pointed out that all of this took place without the knowledge of the Prime Minister, M. Briand, who, regularly informed by me concerning the military situation, was too clever to pay attention to any such ridiculous gossip without first verifying it.

However, the prophecy of M. Charles Humbert not being fulfilled, the Government decided to carry out its plans.

I arrived at Souilly, headquarters of the Second Army, on the morning of September 13th. Here I was joined by General Nivelle, and we proceeded together to the Citadel of Verdun where the city, in the person of its mayor, was to receive the Legion of Honour, the Croix de Guerre, the Cross of St. George and various other foreign decorations. M. Poincaré presided over the ceremony, at which were present the Minister of War, the Minister of the Interior, Generals Pétain and Nivelle, and representatives of the Allied Powers. Members of Parliament of the region were also there, with the exception of M. Charles Humbert, who would doubtless have been somewhat embarrassed had he come.

The ceremony was short, simple and impressive. M. Poincaré made an eloquent address, describing the rôle which Verdun had played in the war and in preparing the general offensive at that moment taking place. He then pinned the decorations on the city's arms. General Nivelle was made a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour. In an hour the ceremony was over.

This homage so justly rendered to the men who had fought at Verdun and the recognition of General Nivelle's services gave me the greatest

pleasure. If history gives me the right to pass judgment upon the general officers who served under my orders, I have it in my heart to say that the true saviour of Verdun was Nivelle, most happily aided by Mangin.

General Pétain arrived at Verdun at the moment when the disorganization which he inherited from General Herr was at its height; assisted by a well-constituted staff and supported by the uninterrupted arrival of fresh troops, he quickly re-established order. The greatness of this accomplishment I readily recognize. But during the conduct of the battle, and especially at the moment of the crisis in June, the most important rôle was played by Nivelle, who had the rare merit of rising above the sole considerations of the battle he was fighting and understanding what I expected of him for the success of wider combinations. He remained cool and kept his resolution unshaken at a time when his chief was sending to the Minister of War the agonizing reports of which I have spoken several times. During the greater part of the defensive phase of the battle, Mangin commanded the sector that was the most threatened; during the second phase, he led two victorious attacks which gave us back Douaumont and Vaux; this suffices to prove his ability as an executive and to show the kind of leader he was.

The results obtained by the Second Army were not yet sufficient to enable General Pétain to assume a defensive attitude in this region. On September 20th he set forth the situation at Verdun and the requirements it entailed as follows:

In conformity with your instructions, a series of detailed operations following one upon another have made it possible to reach a line marked by the Bois Nawé, the depot to the south of the Thiaumont redoubt, Fleury, etc. The front thus attained cannot be considered final. An energetic action on the part of the Second Army is essential if it is to give assistance to the operations on the Somme.

It is, therefore, absolutely necessary to continue pushing forward; the first objective to be reached should be the northern slope of the Ravin de la Dame, the Thiaumont Farm, heights of La Fausse Côte and hill 349. . . .

The method which up to the present has been followed in these detailed operations has obliged the troops to occupy fire-swept portions of the ground and has occasioned heavy losses without bringing decisive results. An operation on a large scale is, therefore, necessary. As the front of attack would have a width of three miles in a straight line, General Nivelle estimates at seven divisions the force necessary to carry it out successfully—three divisions for the attack, three to furnish reliefs and carry out the operations which must follow, one to cover emergencies. . . .

I am, therefore, now giving orders to General Nivelle to begin his preparations for the attack.

I approved these propositions on September 22nd. The work of execution was confided to General Mangin, whose mission it was to force the enemy back beyond the Douaumont Fort. The attack had first been prepared for October 15th, but, being delayed by bad weather, it took place on the 24th.

I left Chantilly the evening before and arrived at Souilly at 8 o'clock in the morning. The attack had been fixed for 2.40 p.m. The weather was none too good, being hazy and unfavourable for observation. I went to General Mangin's command post at Regret, where I found him in high spirits and full of confidence. He had detailed the Moroccan Regiment of colonial infantry for the capture of the Douaumont Fort, and he was confident that this magnificent regiment would be fully capable of "biting off" this piece. I encouraged Mangin in his attitude, urging him to a vigorous offensive, and especially to an immediate and rapid exploitation of the first results we counted upon obtaining. "Sometimes," I added, "any amount of audacity is justifiable." But Mangin was not the sort of man who had to be stimulated.

I took lunch with General Nivelle at Souilly, Generals Pétain and Ragueneau being also present. The first news arrived about an hour after the opening of the attack, being forwarded to division commanders by carrier pigeons. During the afternoon I visited the command posts of the XIV, III, XV and XVI Corps. Further reports reached me at Dieue, while I was with General Marjoulet, XIV Corps. But it was only on returning to Souilly at 5 p.m. that I learned of the splendid results of the day, especially the definite capture of Douaumont. While at Souilly I had Mangin called to the telephone, and I encouraged him to push his success, telling him to take for the purpose every available division, and authorizing him in advance to resort to the boldest measures, however contrary they might be to the advice he had received during the afternoon.

I wanted to be perfectly sure that we actually held Douaumont before sending out the news in a communiqué. As soon as General Nivelle received from Mangin himself confirmation of this fact, I drew up with my own hand a communiqué which I had telephoned to G.H.Q.

The results of the day were excellent. The enemy's lines had been driven in to an average depth of two miles along a front of nearly 5 miles, running from Hardaumont to the Thiaumont redoubt; the village and fort of Douaumont had been retaken.<sup>16</sup> In four hours our troops had reconquered ground which it had taken the enemy four and a half

<sup>16</sup> They had remained in the hands of the Germans since February 24th.

months to tear away from us; 6,000 prisoners and much matériel composed the booty of that happy day.

At 8 o'clock in the evening I left Souilly, arriving at Chantilly the next morning. That day of October 24th was one of the happiest I spent during the war. Its consequences were not long in spreading, and on November 3rd we re-occupied the Vaux Fort which the Germans had abandoned.

This in the eyes of the world was an avowal on their part that the battle of Verdun which they had begun on February 21st had resulted in a failure.

General Nivelle did not want to stop here, and on November 11th he wrote me explaining his plans.<sup>17</sup> The operations he had in view were dictated by three ideas: (a) conform to my instructions, which prescribed for this front the continuance of an attitude which, while defensive, would nevertheless retain there as large a number of enemy forces as possible; (b) improve the local defences of Verdun; (c) prepare for a general offensive.

It was the second of these considerations which determined the zone of attack which we selected.<sup>18</sup> The line we occupied north of the Douaumont Fort was under close and direct view from the observation posts situated on the Côte du Poivre to the west and at Hardaumont to the east; the result was that the troops in the first line, between the Ravine of La Goulette and the Ravine of La Fausse Côte lost some 200 men a day.

Moreover, the Douaumont Fort, whose retention was of prime importance from the point of view of both tactics and morale, was located in our front line, and consequently liable to be taken or surrounded, if the enemy should make a sufficient effort. For these reasons, General Nivelle suggested an attack whose objective would be the line: Côte du Poivre, hill 378, hill 347, the north and south quarries, Hardaumont, Vaux.

These propositions accorded too much with my own views for me to make any objections; I approved them on November 18th.

The attack, delayed at first by bad weather, took place on December 15th. It was longer and more difficult than that of October 24th, violent reactions on the part of the enemy delaying its final success until December 18th. However, all the objectives were reached and held. Our penetration into the enemy's lines had been so deep that his artillery was

<sup>17</sup> Letter S. C. No. 6704.

<sup>18</sup> General Nivelle had proposed two solutions, the one as indicated above, the other an attack against Mort-Homme on the left bank.

disorganized and his reactions lost their power. It is estimated that the Germans lost during these last operations over 25,000 men. We took 12,000 prisoners, of whom 300 were officers. The matériel captured or destroyed amounted to 115 guns, 44 trench mortars, and over 100 machine guns.

This was the last—and not the least glorious—action which took place on the French front while I was in command. The victory of October 24th completed the defeat of the Germans before Verdun. It constituted, moreover, the best possible answer which could be made to the insidious offers of peace which Germany was putting forward at this moment.

But the echo of this brilliant affair was lost in the din of the discussions then going on in Parliament. These brought about a crisis in the High Command and my departure.

### NOTE BY TRANSLATOR

At this point in his Memoirs, Marshal Joffre reverts to the lack of central directing organ for the operations of the Coalition, and the evils that resulted therefrom. This subject has already been dealt with at some length in Chapter IV of Part III.

Much space is also given to the Russian and Italian armies and their operations, the Salonika force, the retreat of the Servian army, the Greek situation and the campaign in Roumania.

Many of these matters have already been dealt with in previous chapters; some of them will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV of this Part.

In order, therefore, to preserve the continuity of the Memoirs, it has been considered preferable to place this material in the Appendix. See page 616.



## CHAPTER IV

*Organization and Munitions.—Plans for Operations.—Looking for new Allies.—Outline of Armistice Conditions*

**D**URING the first days of August, 1916, that is to say when the battle of the Somme was only just beginning and its outcome could not be predicted, I began, as was my habit, to make plans for the following year. If it was bold to suppose at this moment that the campaign of 1916 could bring about the definite defeat of the Central Powers, it was, nevertheless, rational to believe that it would at least break their offensive capacity and that the year 1917 would seal their doom.

### ORGANIZATIONS AND MUNITIONS

While it was still too soon to draw up a plan of operations for the coming campaign, it seemed a good moment to make a general study of the resources which the Allies had at their disposal for prolonging their efforts, and more especially to examine those of France.

With this idea in view, I brought about a conference, which was held at Saleux<sup>1</sup> on August 27th, and at which were present the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Minister of War, the commanders of groups of armies (Foch, Pétain and Franchet d'Esperey), Sir Douglas Haig and myself.

As a preparation for this conference, I had a memorandum drawn up, dated August 20th, to serve as a basis for discussion. In this document I first examined the combined resources of the Coalition, and then in detail those of each of the Allied Armies.

In regard to our own, I pointed out that its aggregate strength was from now on destined to diminish, that up to January, 1917, this diminution would be slight, attaining not more than 40,000 men,<sup>2</sup> but that this would increase with the year 1917 until, by January 1, 1918, it might reach 300,000 or 400,000.

<sup>1</sup> Near Dury on the Somme.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the shortage actually existing, and which for the infantry, active and reserve, amounted to 100,000 men.

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This diminution would bear almost entirely upon the infantry and would be compensated for by an increase in the strength of the artillery and in the power of its weapons which the progress in manufacture, improving every day, now rendered possible. Moreover, it was of the first importance to keep the number of corps and divisions at their present figure. This object, apparently, could be accomplished and the 101 active divisions now on hand preserved, provided their composition was modified.

The type of division which I had in view was as follows:

		27 companies (rifles, "fusils-mitrailleurs." hand and rifle grenades)
3 regiments of infantry	}	9 machine-gun companies 9 37 mm. guns. 9 divisional depot companies
		3 groups of 75 mm. guns
Divisional artillery	}	2 trench mortar batteries of 12 pieces each 2 groups of 155 mm. rapid-fire howitzers, 3 batteries to a group, 4 guns to a battery.

There would be no modification in the organization of engineers or cavalry. The artillery of a corps would be composed of:

		3 groups of 75 mm. guns, 3 batteries to a group, 4 guns to a battery:
		2 of 105 mm.
		3 batteries to a group,
4 groups of heavy artillery:	{	4 guns to a battery.
		2 of 155 mm. long guns
		3 batteries to a group,
		4 guns to a battery.

The artillery reserve of a group of armies would consist of:

10 regiments of tractor artillery, each consisting of

1 "Groupement" of guns,	{	6 groups of 2 batteries each of 4 powerful long range guns
and		
		[4 groups of 2 batteries each of 4 220 mm. rapid-fire howitzers,
1 "Groupement" of howitzers	{	and
		2 groups of 2 batteries each of 2 280 mm. rapid fire howitzers.

75 batteries of 58 mm. No. 2  
 125 batteries of trench artillery 32 batteries of 240 mm. long  
 20 batteries of 340 mm.

On January 1, 1917, it could be anticipated that the number of divisions composed of nine battalions would rise from 8 to 20. All the battalions would have their 37 mm. guns, the companies would have their 8 "fusils-mitrailleurs," 16 grenade throwers and 8 engines for DR grenades.

By that date the divisions could not have received their 155 mm. matériel. The corps artillery would be complete, except that in each corps there would be only one group of 105 mm. howitzers instead of two. The artillery reserve of the groups of armies would not be fully constituted, except in the matter of trench mortars, which would all be on hand.

By January 1, 1918, the infantry divisions would all be of the 9 battalion type. They would have 16 "fusils-mitrailleurs" per company and one tenth of the men of each company would be armed with automatic rifles. Their armament in artillery would be complete.<sup>8</sup>

The situation of our aviation was as follows:

Army corps squadrons	55
Heavy artillery squadrons	21
Pursuit squadrons	19
Bombardment squadrons	19
Total	114 squadrons 1083 aeroplanes.

<sup>8</sup>On July 1, 1916, for 1086 active battalions, there were on hand 1200 field batteries, 425 heavy batteries, 300 foot batteries, 60 batteries of ALGP. (long-range heavy artillery).

On January 1, 1917, for 1047 active battalions we would have 1200 field batteries, 525 heavy batteries, 300 foot batteries and 60 ALGP.

On January 1, 1918, for 873 active battalions there would be 1200 field batteries, 960 heavy batteries, 100 foot batteries and 80 ALGP.

The following table shows what had been done and what remained to be accomplished.

	August 1	Jan. 1	Jan. 1
Guns in the army zone	1916	1917	1918
Field artillery	6,130	6,130	6,700
Heavy artillery	4,200	4,875	6,100
Daily production of shells—			
Field artillery	153,400	186,000	186,000
Heavy artillery	57,500	78,900	93,000
Stocks on hand—			
Field artillery	10,652,000	17,953,000	
Heavy artillery	2,642,000	5,783,000	

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In letter No. 2246 of August 3rd, I had proposed a programme which would give:

- 45 Army corps squadrons of 10 aeroplanes—450
- 10 Replacement squadrons of 10 aeroplanes—100
- 39 Heavy artillery squadrons of 10 aeroplanes—390
- 40 Pursuit squadrons of 12 aeroplanes—480
- 40 Bombardment squadrons of 10 aeroplanes—400
- 174 squadrons composed of 1820 aeroplanes.

This was the situation when the conference of August 27th met. Three points elicited a discussion with the Minister of War. The first was the matter of calling up the 1918 class. I had already frequently asked for the lists to be made and the incorporation started. The Minister considered that, since the 1917 class had been incorporated in January, this precedent should be followed for the succeeding class, so as not to produce the same impression as that given by the Germans, who were using up nearly two classes each year. While recognizing the force of this argument, I pleaded in favour of calling up the men in October, as being a better season for acclimatizing them. This date would enable the training of the recruits to be continued in the depots during the winter and we would be glad to have them available for the following spring. I won my point here, and it was decided that the rolls should be made out in April. It was apparent, moreover, that even if the operations of enrolment began early in September the men could hardly be incorporated before January.

Coming to the question of matériel, I insisted upon the necessity of increasing its power, so as to make up for the deficiency in our infantry, whose losses, according to the calculations of the War Ministry, amounted to 55,000 a month. The Minister did not contest my opinion, but he had doubts as to the programme which had been drawn up by my staff and which I regarded as the minimum. General Roques was afraid that my demands were more than could be met by our factories.

In regard to the reduction in the number of infantry regiments in a division, the principle was agreed to: indeed, necessity was driving us to this measure and the Germans had recourse to it as early as 1915. The Prime Minister suggested that a nucleus of each dissolved regiment should be maintained, with its colours, because of the national sentiment which attached to these regiments, many of which had ancient and glorious traditions, and all of which, during the present war, had added brilliant pages to their histories. This was a happy suggestion, and I proposed that each division should be composed of ten battalions, one

of which could be a depot battalion, bearing the number of the suppressed regiment. I was no longer at the head of affairs when these various transformations took place; but during the last two years of the war, my successors, Generals Nivelle and Pétain, were able to profit by the programme of war material which I had offered and urged, and whose importance indicates the road covered since the war opened. They also profited by the idea I had conceived of maintaining intact the number of our divisions, in spite of the shortage in effectives which now began to make itself felt.

#### PLANS FOR OPERATIONS

On October 1, 1916, I sent to the chiefs of French missions with the Belgian, Russian, Italian, Servian and Roumanian armies, and to Major de Bertier, my representative with General Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, a circular telegram in which I stated my desire to assemble a conference of Commanders-in-Chief, or their representatives. I indicated the date of November 15th as the one most favourable for this meeting, and I drew up an outline of what I thought the programme should be. It was as follows:

Possible line of action of the Germans and Austrians on the various fronts during the winter.

Line of action to be pursued on the various fronts by the Allied Armies during the winter.

Distribution of forces and of war material amongst the Allies for the winter campaign and for that of 1917.

Plans for the operation of the Allied Armies in 1917.

In addition, I asked General Cadorna, Chief of Staff of the Italian Armies, personally to attend this conference, if the situation made it possible.<sup>4</sup>

For this conference I adopted the method of procedure which had been employed in the conference of 1915. I had a memorandum drawn up by my staff which presented a résumé of the questions to be examined during the course of the meeting.<sup>5</sup> The following analysis of this document, will give some idea of what I conceived should be the nature of our discussion.

I first recalled that the plan adopted by the conference of 1915 could be condensed in these few words "attack together and on all our fronts."

<sup>4</sup> General Cadorna could not accept this invitation. I, therefore, went to meet him at Saint-Michel-de-Maurienne on November 7th.

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum of November 12, 1916, No. 8605.

After noting the excellent results which had been obtained from this co-ordination of our efforts—the Russian, Italian and Franco-British victories—I remarked that the entry into the war of Roumania, which should have completed the defeat of our enemies, had not accomplished the results we had anticipated. Without incriminating anyone, I pointed out that the tardiness of Roumania's decision to come into the struggle had given our enemies time in which to mass their forces against her, and that the unity of command exercised by the Germans had brought about an unexpected re-establishment of the situation of the Central Powers.

I thus arrived at my first conclusion, viz., that Germany was our principal enemy and that her defeat would immediately bring about in the dissolution of the coalition opposed to us.

I then placed in parallel columns the forces facing each other along the different fronts, from which I drew the following conclusions:

1. The Allies possessed an aggregate superiority of 2200 battalions (6145 against 3921). This superiority was shown as follows:

On the Franco-Anglo-Belgian front, 168 battalions against 100.

On the Russo-Roumanian front, 156 against 100.

On the Macedonian front, 113 against 100.

On the Italian front, 200 against 100.

2. The larger part of the German forces—129 divisions out of a total of 203—were on the Western front.

3. Except in the Caucasus, the numerical superiority of the Allies was marked.

I then took up a comparative study of the respective importance of the different fronts, and I reached the conclusion that in the European theatre there were two fronts of prime importance:

1. The Western front, where a rapid decision of the war could and should be sought.

2. The Eastern front, where a decision could be sought only after the Balkan Powers allied to Germany and Austria had been reduced to impotence.

I next examined the line of action which should be maintained by the Coalition. "The time seems to have now come," I said, "for destroying the enemy's defensive capacity after having paralysed his offensive power. . . . Final victory cannot be obtained by a slow and indefinite attrition of the adverse forces. . . . The happy results obtained up to the present go to show that we can accomplish our ends by energetically pursuing the line of action which we have followed up to the present, provided that

the operations of the Allied armies are closely co-ordinated and that we make use of our numerical superiority with good judgment. Added to the constant increase in our resources in matériel, this numerical superiority should enable us, first, *to immobilize the enemy on all fronts*; second, to profit by this advantageous situation to deal him decisive blows at particularly sensitive points."

After this introduction, I next outlined the plan of action for the Coalition during the winter of 1916-17. Whether the enemy sought to develop his offensive against Roumania or whether he sought conspicuous objectives close by—such as Nancy or Rheims, Riga or Minsk—or whether, on the contrary, he sought to take advantage of the lull to reconstitute his units and accumulate a stock of ammunition with a view to resuming the initiative of operations in the spring of 1917, I laid down as a first principle to guide us that we "should continue the offensives started upon the different fronts with as great intensity as was permitted by the climatic conditions obtaining in each."

I, therefore, considered it essential that the Franco-British armies on the Western front, the Italian armies on the Isonzo front, and, if possible, the Russian armies on their own front, should display the greatest possible activity, while at the same time making preparations for the decisive effort which they would be called upon to put forth in the spring.

I also indicated as a matter of major importance that an immediate attack should be made against Bulgaria *in order to bring that Power to her knees*. The principal action would be undertaken from the north by Russian and Roumanian forces, assisted by the army of Salonika from the south.<sup>6</sup>

I requested the representatives of the Allied Powers to make a study of their secondary theatres and pursue their operations there, keeping always in mind the necessity of economizing their forces.

I next passed from this part of our plan of action to that which should be pursued in the spring of 1917. On the Western front, I proposed that an operation on a large scale should be undertaken by the Belgian, British and French armies, and that this attack should be furnished with the most powerful means which we could gather together.

The Italian armies would make an attack in full force, while the Rus-

<sup>6</sup> With this object in view I had made approaches to our British Allies during the conference at Boulogne to induce them to raise the strength of their army in the Near East to 7 divisions: during my interview with General Cadorna at Saint-Michel-de-Maurienne I also urged him to increase to three divisions the Italian troops assigned to the Allied Army at Salonika, which contingent at that time comprised only three brigades.

sian and Roumanian armies, once Bulgaria had been disposed of, would decide upon the best method of pursuing their operations.

In conclusion, after making a résumé of the principal ideas advanced, I said "if my propositions meet with your approval, I request the conferees:

1. Definitely to fix the Coalition's plan of action for the winter of 1916-17 and the spring of 1917 in accordance with ideas previously decided upon, and to conduct all their actions upon their respective fronts in harmony with this decision.

2. To fix the approximate dates on which the offensives should be executed.

3. To determine the apportionment of resources which would conform to the decisions taken."

The above memorandum was distributed to the various Commanders-in-Chief, or to their representatives, for examination before the conference opened. Needless to say, a copy had been sent to the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and the Minister of War.

When the conference assembled, the Allied Armies were represented as follows:

Belgium by General Wielemans, Chief of the General Staff of the Belgian Army.

Great Britain by General Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff; Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies in France, and General Maurice, Chief of the Operations Branch at the War Office.

Italy by General Porro, Chief of the General Staff of the Italian Army, and Colonel Tellini, Chief of the Operations Bureau at Italian G.H.Q.

Japan by Colonel Nasaï, Military Attaché at Paris.

Roumania by Colonels Rudeanu, Chief of the Roumanian Military Mission at French G.H.Q., and Rascano, representative of Roumanian G.H.Q.

Russia by Generals Palitzine, Chief of the Russian Military Mission, representing the Czar, and Dessino, representing the Russian General Staff at British G.H.Q.

Servia by General Rachitch, delegate of the Servian Army to French G.H.Q. and Colonel Pechitch, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Servian Army.

France was represented by General de Castelnau and myself. General Pellé and Colonel Billettee performed the duty of secretaries to the conference.



General Wielemans, chief of staff of the Belgian Army, was animated by most excellent intentions. He had worked hard to re-organize his army in accordance with modern ideas and, in spite of the great difficulties encountered, he had largely succeeded. He had endeavoured to keep in close contact with our army, detailing his officers to our training centres and sending his divisions to our camps. Nothing but good could come of such intimate contacts. I am obliged to add that the excellent intentions of General Wielemans did not always overcome the objections of his associates. For example, the relief of a division at the front had been postponed because Lieutenant-Colonel Maglinse, chief of the Operations Bureau, had considered it impossible to carry out such an operation "during the battle of the Somme."<sup>7</sup> I relate this point merely to show that there were still officers belonging to the Belgian General Staff who did not fully comprehend the responsibilities which must be assumed and the risks taken during war. Nothing but most excellent results could flow from the occasion the conference would offer to the Belgians for showing their desire to be ready for every eventuality when the campaign of 1917 opened.

It is hardly necessary to speak here of General Haig, whose energetic co-operation had been so loyally given me during all of 1916, nor of General Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, between whom and myself there existed an entire communion of ideas regarding the conduct of operations. Some friction had arisen between these two men, but if they differed on a few questions of detail, they were in accord upon one point which to me was the essential one, namely, that the Western front was the one on which the war's decision must be sought, and consequently the one where the British and French should accumulate the greater part of their resources. I have been told that Robertson and Haig differed here with three important members of the British Cabinet—Asquith, Edward Grey and Lloyd George. The last, whom Robertson laughingly called "our Napoleon," had conceived some prodigious schemes in his impetuous and changeable brain, wanting us to proceed eastward and strike a decisive blow against Austria. I have already explained that this idea was not wholly new and that the British Government had on several occasions proposed it.

I was extremely sorry that General Cadorna could not be present to represent Italy at this military parliament of the Allies. Since this was impossible, he and I, as I have already mentioned, met at Saint-Michel-

<sup>7</sup> Letter No. 1185 of November 12, 1916, from Lieut.-Col. Génie. Personal file of the Commander-in-Chief, Vol. II, Folder 4, Document 10.

de-Maurienne on November 7th and examined the principal questions then occupying us. General Cadorna's chief of staff, General Porro, did what he could to replace his chief at the conference, but I several times got the impression that the important questions being discussed found him somewhat out of his depth.

I have mentioned in the preceding chapter under what conditions General Palitzine had arrived amongst us. Throughout the conference he showed himself to be in complete accord with my ideas.

Colonel Rudeanu, representing the Roumanian Army, lived in the depressing atmosphere of the bad news which arrived each day from his country. His anxiety, which indeed I shared, in no way affected the clearness of his judgment, and he courageously controlled the bitterness he felt at the failure of the Russians to come to the aid of their comrades-in-arms, except under conditions to which it seems useless again to refer.

It is hardly necessary to mention the Japanese representatives, for Japan's army was not directly engaged in the struggle. I will have occasion to say later on how much I desired to have it contribute a more efficacious assistance.

General Rachitch, representing the Servian Army, brought me an autograph letter which Prince Alexander had confided to Colonel Pechitch. I will quote it in full, for it explains very clearly the views held by the Servian General Staff at this moment:<sup>8</sup>

Ostrovo, Oct. 12/25, 1916.

My dear General:

Colonel Pechitch will hand to you a memorandum which the General Staff of my army has drawn up for the use of the conference of November 15th and he will explain to you my point of view.

It is thanks to the sagacity with which you directed the work of the preceding conference that concerted action on the various fronts was assured in 1916 and a long step taken towards final victory. I know the prestige which you enjoy with the Allied General Staffs, and I am certain that the plan of campaign for the coming winter and spring will likewise be guided by the idea of close co-operation amongst all the Allied Armies.

The importance from a general point of view of the Salonika front has never been more manifest than at the present moment. Since Roumania came into the war, it has been clear to everybody that it is in the Balkans that the Allies can deliver the most telling blow against their common enemy. It is, however, superfluous to insist upon the weakness now existing in the Army of the Near East, and the dangers to which it will be exposed if necessary reinforcements are not sent in good time. You have never failed to show how fully you comprehended the services which this army could render to the Allied cause and the rôle of the Servian representatives at the conference

<sup>8</sup> Personal file of the Commander-in-Chief, Vol. II, Folder 4, Document 2.

will mostly consist in pointing out what remains to be done to enable this army properly to fulfil its important task. I know you will welcome them cordially, and I would be grateful if you could find it possible to support them during the conference with the weight of your authority.

Believe me, dear General,

Very sincerely yours,

ALEXANDER.

The Conference opened at Chantilly on November 15th at 10 a.m. After welcoming the delegates and devoting a few words to the results obtained in the year 1916, I requested General Pellé to read the memorandum of November 12th.

Colonel Rudeanu remarked that while it was regrettable that Roumania had not intervened at an earlier date, it was no less unfortunate that the Allies had delayed so long in furnishing her the means of taking the field. Since the beginning of the war he had constantly pointed out to the Allies how deficient the Roumanian Army was in artillery munitions, and he had even declared that if the supplies required were not furnished before his country entered the campaign, it would be most difficult afterwards to furnish what the army needed. In spite of the efforts of France, Great Britain and Russia, Roumania was still not receiving what she urgently required.

I replied that the memorandum drawn up by my staff was not intended as any reproach, and that circumstances over which Roumania and the Allied Powers had no control had caused the delay; it had been mentioned merely as an existing fact.

General Porro then stated that the figures which I had employed in drawing up the balance sheet of the forces facing each other should be rectified in regard to the Austrian Army opposed to Italy, as well as to the number of Italian battalions.<sup>9</sup> Our calculations included some 100 territorial battalions. General Porro said that these were badly armed, had no machine guns, and were poorly officered; therefore, the number of Italian battalions should be placed at 668 instead of 785.<sup>10</sup>

I answered by pointing out that we had included 315 battalions in the French totals, and while these had less value than active units, they, nevertheless, were not a negligible quantity since they could defend quiet sectors and thus liberate active troops.

Coming now to the situation on the Balkan front, General Palitzine

<sup>9</sup> General Porro gave as 34 the number of Austrian infantry divisions instead of 32½, as indicated in the memorandum: in other words, 389 battalions, instead of 379.

<sup>10</sup> This would reduce the proportion of Italian forces on the front from 206 per cent to 170 per cent.

declared that the memorandum was in exact accord with the ideas of General Alexeieff, who attached the very highest importance to this theatre. He considered that the Balkan question should be settled once for all, a decisive result being sought through vigorous action on the part of the Army of the Near East and the Russo-Roumanian armies.

Colonel Rudeanu here remarked that if the Turkish and Bulgarian armies were crushed, a decision of the war could be secured on the Eastern front, and that our victory would be obtained by following the shortest line.

When the list of the conspicuous and near-by objectives which the enemy might have in view was read, General Porro suggested that to these be added the Venetian plain. I asked him whether this objective could be attained by way of the Isonzo; he answered that the Austrians might try to reach it by attacking, as their first objective, the Asiago plateau, which was practicable in winter. I remarked that if this was the case, the Italian army might undertake winter operations not only on the Isonzo but also in this part of the Trentino.

The rest of the memorandum occasioned no further observations. I then read the questions which I desired the conference to decide. The first was as follows:

Do the conferees approve in principle the Coalition's plan of action for the winter of 1916-17 and the spring of 1917, as defined in the memorandum. More especially, do they consider—

(a) That a decision of the war should be sought by resuming co-ordinated offensives in the spring of 1917, using for this purpose all the resources which can be collected during the winter.

(b) That the best way of creating favourable conditions for this offensive consists in pursuing offensive actions during the whole of the winter along all of the fronts, as far as climatic conditions make this possible.

The conferees replied affirmatively to the first question.

I then passed to the second: "Does the conference approve the plan for employing our forces as set forth in the memorandum? If yes, does it consider—

(a) That a powerful attack, intended to be decisive, should be prepared for the spring of 1917 and carried out on the Anglo-Franco-Belgian frontier.

(b) That the Italian Army should resume its offensives in the spring with increased resources.

(c) That, reserving the line of action to be taken with regard to Bulgaria (this being the object of a subsequent question), powerful offen-

sives should be undertaken on parts of the Eastern front to be selected by the Russian High Command."

The second question was likewise unanimously adopted.

I then read the third: On what approximate dates should the offensives on the various fronts be started in the spring of 1917? I here had General Pellé read a note which I had annexed, giving my opinion upon this point. In it, after pointing out that the Allied offensives in the preceding year had not started until the beginning of June, thus giving the initiative of operations to our enemies, I asserted that we had every interest in preventing this from happening again. For that reason we should take advantage of the bad season to reconstitute our forces and increase our stock of munitions, while continuing on all fronts the greatest possible activity; then pronounce a grand offensive as soon as it was possible to do so simultaneously on all fronts. "But it should be perfectly understood," I remarked at the end of the note, "that the first consideration is to be ready as soon as possible, so that the enemy may not anticipate us, or, in case he attacks, be ready to answer his action by an offensive on all fronts."

Sir Douglas Haig stated that if the military situation required it, he could attack on February 1st; but, except in case of necessity, he considered it best to wait until his armies were ready to exert their maximum effort; that is to say, during the early days of May.

General Palitzine stated that the Russian Army could make an offensive in the winter, provided that clothing and food for the soldiers were furnished abundantly; that from the middle of March to the end of April no important operation was possible; after this date the Russian Army would be able to exert its whole strength in any attack decided upon.

General Porro said that the first of May appeared to be the date most favourable for an Italian offensive, not only on account of weather conditions, but because by this time his army would have been reinforced by four divisions and its artillery matériel brought up to date.

I closed the discussion by stating that what had been said seemed to take the enemy too little into account, and I urged that, in order to avoid a repetition of what had happened in 1916, the Allies should be ready to attack during the first two weeks of February, should circumstances require it. I thought that a sufficient degree of simultaneousness would be realized if the attacks were not separated by a longer period than three weeks.

After an adjournment for lunch, the meeting resumed at 2.30 p.m., when the fourth question was propounded: Does the conference con-

sider it necessary to make an effort to crush Bulgaria immediately? If yes, the following must be done:

- (a) Draw up the general plan of operation.
- (b) Fix the task falling respectively to the Russian and Roumanian armies, and the Army of the Near East.
- (c) Decide upon the number of troops and amount of war material necessary.

I then made a résumé of the problem: It is considered necessary to crush Bulgaria as quickly as possible by two simultaneous offensives, the one starting from Salonika, the other from the Danube. A study made by my staff of the first of these operations went to indicate that it is impossible to transport, supply and fight an army of more than 23 divisions in Macedonia. This was the maximum number that I suggested should be assembled and permanently maintained at full strength. These 23 divisions would be furnished as follows: seven by Great Britain, six by France, six by Serbia, three by Italy and one by Russia.

At present, 18 of these divisions have already been assembled; Great Britain and France would despatch additional forces to make up their contingents as mentioned. The sending of the three brigades which remained as Italy's share would be subject to the fulfilment of certain preliminary conditions. If her decision accorded with the French and British views, the five divisions remaining to be sent could arrive by the second week in December.

General Porro here stated that at Saint-Michel-de-Maurienne Général Cadorna had agreed in principle to the maintenance of three Italian divisions with the Army of the Near East, provided that "the principal axis of operations was moved towards the east, so as to prevent any offensive of the Central Powers against the Italian front, or at least to diminish its probability."

I remarked to General Porro that the conditions imposed by General Cadorna seemed to be not the same as those he had mentioned to me at Saint-Michel-de-Maurienne. I understood that he had agreed to the increase of forces requested, provided General Alexieff declared his willingness to undertake an operation for crushing Bulgaria.

General Porro replied that General Cadorna did not think it possible to reduce his forces until such time as the enemy resources were entirely directed towards the Eastern theatre, since the Trent salient, only 40 miles from the Po, menaced the Italian communications. Now that Italy had declared war against Germany, a German attack against her through Switzerland must be regarded as possible, and the result would be to

widen the front to be defended by 139 miles and lay Milan open to menace.

I answered General Porro that I had already anticipated the measures which must be taken in case Swiss neutrality was violated; indeed, such an action by Germany would create a very favourable situation for the Allies; moreover, should the Italian army become too heavily pressed, I had guaranteed to General Cadorna the direct aid of French forces.

General Palitzine now took the floor. While comprehending the reasons which General Cadorna had advanced, he wished to point out that all the belligerent Powers were menaced by attacks on the part of the enemy and that if a serious offensive was undertaken in the Balkans it would quite sufficiently parry the manœuvre which the Italians feared. He thought that General Cadorna should announce exactly when he intended to send the three additional brigades to Salonika; if he waited until the Allied forces were already nearing Sofia, the assistance expected from the Italian forces would count for nothing.

General Porro contented himself with answering that it was the intention of his chief not to send any troops from the Italian theatre as long as he considered an attack by the enemy on his front as possible.

General Rachitch then read a memorandum setting forth the Servian viewpoint. After recalling that all the conferees were in agreement regarding the importance of the Salonika front, and declaring that the object to be attained by the Allied armies in that region was to crush Bulgaria by marching on Sofia, the Servian delegate asked, in the name of the Servian Commander-in-Chief that the total strength of the armies of Salonika should be raised to at least 300,000 bayonets.

A discussion was started upon this proposition. I once more detailed the many reasons for not increasing the Army of the East beyond the figures I had already indicated, and I urged that the defeat of Bulgaria could be effected by combined action of the Russian and Roumanian armies and the Army of the Near East, once the latter was raised to 23 divisions; but the Austro-German armies must first be kept tied down to other fronts by means of sufficiently powerful offensives.

General Robertson declared that he shared my opinion, pointing out that the communications by sea between the Allies and the Balkans were manifestly inferior to the land communications at the disposal of our adversaries. He thought that the Servians probably did not understand how great an effort was being already demanded of the British Navy; under the circumstances, to transport and supply an army such as the Servians had in view would probably be impossible.

General Palitzine again stated that the Russian High Command was willing to undertake a large effort against the Bulgarians, but he thought that it was better to act immediately with twenty divisions than to put off the operation until a larger force could be assembled.

It was now General Porro's turn, and General Palitzine asked him if he did not think that the engagements taken by the Russians would give sufficient guarantee to General Cadorna and that the time had come for sending the three Italian brigades to Salonika without further delay. The Italian representative contented himself with saying that Russia had not yet started the execution of her offensive against Bulgaria.

Thus each of the Allied representatives continued to stand his ground.

I then passed to the fifth question: What operations should be undertaken on the secondary theatres—Egypt, the Caucasus, Persia and Mesopotamia? Was it possible to reduce the effectives now engaged in some of them?

General Robertson stated that the British forces stationed in Egypt could not be reduced during the winter, but he thought that this could be done in the spring.

I then read the sixth question: Are the conferees willing to renew the engagement taken at the meeting of December 5, 1915, namely, that if one of the Allied Powers should be attacked by the enemy the others would immediately come to its assistance with all the means in their power?

In case of an affirmative answer, the assistance to be rendered the Ally attacked might be given in one or both of the following forms:

(a) Indirect aid, through delivering attacks by the armies not attacked in zones already prepared.

(b) Direct aid, through sending forces from one theatre to another, wherever easy means of communication existed between them. (It was under this form that our Russian Allies had brought assistance to the Roumanians.) I added that the conferees should decide whether, in view of such eventualities, a combined study should not be undertaken by the British, French and Italian staffs.

This question being unanimously adopted, we passed to the seventh question: Is it considered advisable to enrol in the Servian Army men of the Servian race taken prisoner by Italy and Russia.

General Porro remarked that the suggestions concerning the liberation of Yugo-slav prisoners had already been made to the Italian Government, the question belonging rather to the domain of politics. The Italians held 3000 of these prisoners; but if they were sent to the Servian Army, Italian



prisoners held by the Austrians would be subject to reprisals. For this reason the Italian Government had agreed only to release individual prisoners who volunteered to serve in the Servian Army.

The eighth and ninth questions dealt with the assistance which Great Britain, France and Italy could give Russia and Roumania in the matter of armament and munitions. They were referred to a special committee, whose sittings began at 5 p.m. the same day. General Pellé, Colonel Poindron, Major Raymond and a representative of M. Albert Thomas, took part in these meetings, which continued for several days.

The conference ended on the evening of the 15th; on the 16th the representatives of the Allied Armies signed the following declaration:

1. The conferees approve the plan of Allied action as set forth in the memorandum presented to them, the object of the plan being to give a decisive character to the campaign of 1917. They have, therefore, agreed to the following:

a. During the winter of 1916-17 the offensive operations now under way will be actively continued, as far as weather conditions on the various fronts permit.

b. To be in a position to meet any new situation, and more especially in order to prevent the enemy from seizing the initiative of operations, the Allied Armies must be ready to undertake general offensives by the first week in February, 1917; all the resources at their disposal should be devoted to this combined action.

c. As soon as any army is ready to attack, its commander-in-chief will regulate his line of conduct in accordance with the situation existing at the moment.

d. Unless circumstances prevent, general offensives engaging the maximum of resources at the disposal of each army, will be started along all the fronts as soon as they can be made simultaneously, the dates being fixed by agreement amongst the Commanders-in-Chief.<sup>11</sup>

e. For the purpose of making the arrangements required by these hypotheses, Commanders-in-Chief will maintain constant communication with each other.

2. *On the Balkan front:*

a. The Coalition will endeavour to crush Bulgaria as soon as possible. The Russian High Command is determined to continue and intensify its operations with this end in view.

b. The Russo-Roumanian forces will operate against Bulgaria from

<sup>11</sup> It is accepted that simultaneousness will be considered as effected when not more than three weeks intervene between the dates fixed for beginning the offensives on the various fronts.

the north while the Allied Army of Salonika operates from the south, the action of these two groups being closely co-ordinated, the idea being to obtain a decision on one or the other of the two fronts, according as the operations develop.

c. The Allied Army of the Near East will be brought up to a strength of 23 divisions as soon as possible; this strength corresponds, on the one hand, to the force which it is possible to manœuvre and supply upon this theatre, and, on the other, to the number of troops which can be taken from the Western theatres. To bring the army up to this strength, the British Government will immediately increase its quota to 7 divisions, the French Government to 6 divisions; the Italian Government, in view of the clearly asserted intention of the Russian High Command, is requested to raise its contingent at Salonika to three divisions.

d. The effectives of the Allied Army of the East will be rigorously maintained at full strength.

### 3. *Secondary Theatres of Operations.*

Actions will be pursued upon all secondary fronts for the purpose of immobilizing the enemy's forces there; but a minimum of forces will be thus employed in order that a maximum of strength may be assigned to the principal theatres.

### 4. *Mutual Support.*

The conferees renew the engagement of mutual support taken at the conference of December 5, 1915, and which has been carried out during the course of the present year, to wit: if one of the Powers is attacked, the others will immediately come to its assistance with all the means at their command—either indirectly, by means of offensives which the army not attacked would open in zones already prepared, or directly, by the despatch of forces, when the theatres of operations are connected by easy communications.

To meet this last eventuality, studies will be undertaken by the French, British and Italian staffs, embracing the transport of their forces and their employment in combination.

### 5. *Maintenance of the Strength of the Servian Army.*

The Servian effectives will be maintained through the voluntary enlistment of prisoners of Servian race held by Italy and Russia, under conditions and with the precautions which may be determined by these two Powers.

The Conference ended at 11.30 a.m., October 16th. The representatives of the Allied Armies then took luncheon with M. Briand, Minister

of Foreign Affairs: at its close a meeting of political and military authorities was held and the military decisions taken at the Conference were ratified. In the evening, the President of the Republic entertained the Allied representatives at dinner.

I was extremely satisfied with the results we had accomplished. Thanks to the great good-will manifested by all, and for which I wish to express here my appreciation, I considered that the harvest sown by our combined efforts in 1916 would certainly be reaped in 1917.

The plan I had proposed to the Allies appeared so entirely to meet existing circumstances that neither the British Government nor the British High Command found any fault with it; General Cadorna had given it his approval during our interview at Saint-Michel-de-Maurienne, and the Russian High Command, which at first seemed fluctuating, now expressed itself, in the person of General Palitzine, as entirely in accord with my views. It remained to ensure its energetic execution; this was to be the object of my next effort.

However, my task did not end there. On November 29th, I assembled at my headquarters, along with Sir Douglas Haig, the generals commanding our groups of armies.<sup>12</sup> I informed them of the important decisions which had been taken at the conference of October 16th and I explained to them my views in regard to the Franco-British offensive, which I proposed should begin during the month of February. In its general outlines, this offensive at the start would be a resumption of the battle of the Somme, only on a wider front. It would be carried out on the French side by the Northern Group of Armies (General Foch) which would attack between the Oise and the Somme, using the Tenth, Sixth, Third and First Armies, each initially composed of three corps of four divisions each; a total of 48 divisions, or one-half of the French Army.<sup>13</sup>

General Pétain, commanding the Centre Group of Armies, would stand ready to intervene in the battle by making an attack between Soissons and Rheims, and (eventually) up to Souain, for the purpose of co-operating in the rupture which the Northern Group of Armies might make, or else seeking to produce this rupture himself, if General Foch's attack should fail.

<sup>12</sup> I had put off this meeting several days while waiting for the return of General Haig from England.

<sup>13</sup> The initial composition provided for was:

Tenth Army: II, X, XXI Corps.

Sixth Army: II Colonial Corps. XX and XXXII Corps.

Third Army: I Colonial Corps. VI, VII Corps.

First Army: XIII, XIV and XXXV Corps.

General Haig proposed to make an attack in conjunction with ours from Bapaume to Vimy, using two armies, the Fifth and the Third, acting convergently upon the two faces of the German salient at Bapaume.

General Pétain's attack was conceived as an operation for breaking through a thinly held front, and was to take place about fifteen days after that of the Northern Group of Armies. It was, therefore, to be ready for February 20th.

Once the Bapaume salient was reduced, Haig's intention was to push the main body of his forces northward, so as to make an attack in Flanders and thus open the way for a disembarkation on the Belgian coast between Nieuport and Ostend.

The essential idea which governed me was that the battle of 1916 had so thoroughly disorganized the enemy's defences and the German reserves had been used up to such an extent that, if we now made a supreme effort, we could hardly fail to obtain decisive results.

Events proved that this opinion was not unjustified. At the very moment that I was making my plans, Hindenburg had decided to refuse the battle I was about to offer him and to fall back to a shorter line, running from the neighbourhood of Arras to Coucy-le-Château, along the western edge of Saint-Quentin. This decision amounted to an avowal on the part of the Germans that they considered themselves powerless to resist the attack we were preparing to make.

I think it must also be admitted that the date for the offensive, which I had got General Haig to accept, was well chosen. By beginning the battle during the first days of February, 1917, as had been decided, the Germans would have been taken by surprise at the very moment of making their move. This would have brought us the unhopcd-for good luck of attacking them just as they were no longer in full force on their first positions and had not yet become installed in their new lines farther back.

But it is useless to try to remake history, and I will insist no further upon these vain regrets.

#### SEEKING NEW ALLIES

To finish the enumeration of my plans for the campaign about to open, I will now indicate my efforts to obtain fresh military aid, which become more and more necessary each day by reason of the heavy losses incurred by the Allied Armies during the preceding months. It was this

consideration which dictated my endeavour to obtain the co-operation of the Portuguese and an intervention on the part of Japan. Political conditions during the latter half of 1916 seemed to indicate this as possible.

The Portuguese question had already been raised some time before I was requested by the Prime Minister to consider it. In fact, Portugal had already declared war against the Central Powers and had assembled a few units which it desired the Allies to make use of.

On July 5th, I suggested that this assistance should not be neglected<sup>14</sup> but before deciding upon the employment of the Portuguese contingents, it was important to estimate their military value, and for this reason I thought that we should now send to Portugal the Military Mission I had formerly suggested. This was done, and Lieutenant-Colonel Paris left for Lisbon, accompanied by several other officers.

After studying the situation, he expressed the opinion that the Trancos Division, which on October 1st was mobilized and ready to take ship, should be sent to France. Upon receiving this recommendation, I asked for it to be embarked as soon as possible, installed in camp and its training completed by French officers. After an exchange of views between the French and British Governments, it was decided, on November 2nd, that the division should be sent to France but that it would be trained, supplied and employed by the British Army.

As related in a previous chapter of these Memoirs,<sup>15</sup> I had already made an effort to obtain the active co-operation of the excellent troops constituting the Japanese Army. Towards the end of 1916 this intervention seemed on the point of being realized, the Japanese Ambassador at Petrograd having suggested, towards the end of October, that it would be possible to send some elements of Japanese heavy artillery to the Russian front. I supported this proposition without hesitation.<sup>16</sup> For it was evident that this form of Japanese assistance presented the highest interest from a military point of view, since the Russian Army, in spite of Allied efforts, was still seriously lacking in heavy artillery and the Japanese guns would very greatly augment the offensive power of the Russian Army during the operations anticipated for 1917.

It might even be hoped that, once she had started along these lines, Japan would not halt her efforts here, but would finally agree to put in

<sup>14</sup> Letter to the Prime Minister, No. 3052.

<sup>15</sup> Part II, Chapter VI, pages 322-4.

<sup>16</sup> Telegram No. 180 of November 1st to General Janin. Letter No. 117 of November 1st to the Prime Minister.

all her military forces alongside the Allied Armies, in spite of the difficulties, especially in the matter of transportation, that presented themselves. Unfortunately the Russian revolution brought these plans to nought, and the question of Japanese intervention was buried once for all.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Here follow 16 pages devoted to Armistice conditions as prepared by Marshal Joffre. These have a purely academic interest and are omitted.—Translator.



## CHAPTER V

### *MY RELATIONS WITH POLITICS IN 1916* *—MY RESIGNATION*

AT THE end of the chapter dealing with the year 1915, when giving some account of my relations with political affairs during the course of that year, I stated that on December 2nd a decree signed by the President of the Republic had enlarged my functions and fortified my authority. I had no illusions as to this being the end of my difficulties with the politicians. The war had been going on for seventeen months and threatened to continue for a long time. The human losses sustained, the sufferings and dangers endured by the inhabitants in the zone of the armies, the acts of barbarity inflicted upon our unfortunate citizens in the invaded provinces, the hardships of every sort imposed upon the whole population, induced, as time went on, a state of ever-increasing unrest. Then came Verdun, and during the whole of the first half of 1916, French nerves were subjected to a most severe trial.

While this condition was comprehensible, it presented a double danger. In a war such as we were waging the morale of the nation was an essential element of victory, and while the duty of maintaining it fell to the Government rather than to me, on the other hand—and this was the second element of the question—it was my business to look after the morale of the army and see to it that the weariness which began to manifest itself in the rear did not spread to the front.

To this end, I instituted a strict control of the press, and I called the attention of the Government to all articles which had passed the censor but which, for one reason or another, seemed dangerous.

Much criticism has been directed at the censorship exercised during the war. As the Government created the system, there is no occasion for me to defend it here. It is possible that blunders were made and that excesses crept in; nevertheless, it was essential for control to be established and maintained. Think for a moment of what would have happened had the press retained its liberty of printing whatever it chose,

as in times of peace. Any man serving at the front could have written to a journalist, and given him an outline of some operation then being planned; a few days later it might have appeared in the columns of a newspaper. Can it be asserted that the patriotism of the journalist would have prevented him from yielding to the temptation of publishing an interesting piece of news? Was it not in a great French newspaper that the Germans, during the war of 1870, discovered most important information concerning the movements of our army?

There was another aspect though of less importance; it was impossible to allow a publicist, no matter how good his intentions, to be the judge of what he could and what he could not say, for he probably would not be qualified to discern the danger existing in statements which to him seemed entirely harmless. The public does not realize that the enemy seldom gets his information through the capture of important documents; more generally it comes through fitting together little pieces of information, which, taken separately, seem without value. Again, it would have been dangerous to allow campaigns to be waged in the press, which, under the praiseworthy pretext of stimulating energies and overcoming resistances in the interior of the country, tended to make our soldiers at the front believe that nothing was being done to push the production of war material. We could not permit the incessant criticism of the conduct of operations made by self-appointed strategists knowing nothing whatever of war or of the conditions which faced us, and wholly ignorant not only of our own particular difficulties but of those which concerned our relations with our Allies. At a time when the safety of the country exacted that co-operation and harmony should be the sole rule of conduct, it would have been folly to permit the circulation of articles tending to rouse the front against the rear, the troops against the staffs, the foot-soldiers against the artillerymen, the army against its chiefs.

Some will say that France had won her political liberties only after a long struggle and that it was hard for her to renounce that freedom of the press upon which she set such store; but had not the soldier in the trenches abandoned not only his political liberty and all his other liberties, in order to defend freedom itself and the country's very existence? If, because of war, it was the duty of the mobilized soldier to sacrifice his life, why should not the citizen in the interior sacrifice for a while his right to talk? There was no iniquity in exacting obedience to the law of silence.

Early in 1916 the indiscretions of the press reached such a point that



I had to intervene directly with the Government. On January 14th I personally delivered to the Minister of War, General Gallieni, the following letter calling his attention to this matter:

G.H.Q., January 14, 1916.

From The Commander-in-Chief

To The Minister of War

(Personal)

Within the last few weeks, criticisms of the High Command in certain newspapers have reached such a point as to constitute a veritable campaign of hostility. As examples, I mention *L'Homme Enchaîné*, *Paris Midi*, and *La Victoire*. I would also invite attention to the publication in *Le Journal* of January 10th of a document addressed to the Under-Secretary of State for Artillery and which furnishes information most useful to the enemy concerning the organization of one of our armies.

It is for the Government to decide—and in regard to military censorship it is especially for you to appreciate—to what extent the press should be prevented in time of war from publishing information and making criticisms as it is accustomed to do in times of peace.

As for myself, responsible as I am for the discipline of the armies placed under my orders, I can only report to you that I have daily evidence of the injury caused to that discipline by the attacks of certain newspapers against the heads of the army, against the staffs, against officers. In case these attacks are repeated, I shall consider it my duty to forbid the sale of these papers in the zone of the armies, and I have the honour so to inform you.

JOFFRE.<sup>1</sup>

I was determined that if I did not obtain satisfaction in this matter from the Minister of War, I would submit it to the President of the Republic, so urgent and important did I consider it to be. But Gallieni was too intelligent not to see the force of my argument; he gave the necessary orders to his subordinates, and for a while the press became more prudent and moderate in its comments.<sup>2</sup>

It was about this time that General Gallieni, being ill, left the Ministry of War, being replaced on January 16th by General Roques.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Strictly Personal File of the Commander-in-Chief, Volume II, Folder 3, Document 44.

<sup>2</sup> The question of censorship was taken up several times at meetings of the Council of National Defence. On January 14, 1916, especially, I spoke to M. Briand and M. Malvy on the subject. They gave me every assurance that the campaign going on in the press would be stopped.

<sup>3</sup> There was much discussion in the Cabinet as to the person to be chosen to replace Gallieni. M. de Freycinet was suggested; but he was nearly ninety years old. Then M. Briand contemplated taking the Ministry of War, handing over the Foreign Office to M. Bourgeois. Finally it was decided to select a general officer. The members of the Government hesitated between Lyautey, Dubail and Roques. I had thought of General Famin, Inspector General of Colonial Troops, who had rendered eminent services ever since the beginning of the war.

He was the fourth Minister under whom I had served since the war started. The first, M. Messimy, was an old officer of the army, and he had lasted only a few weeks after the beginning of operations. The second was M. Millerand, and I have already expressed the admiration I had for him and the gratitude I still feel for the staunch support he always brought me and the vigorous impetus he gave to the manufacture of our munitions. My relations with his successor, during the short term of his office, were always cordial, in spite of inevitable divergences—such as the one I have just mentioned—which sometimes arose. The men who surrounded him were not friendly to me; nevertheless, as I have said elsewhere, Gallieni never failed in the loyal collaboration which he had promised me on the day he took office.

General Roques carried less weight than did the pacifier of Madagascar. But it should not be forgotten that he took office at a moment when political passions were no longer held in leash, as they had been in 1914, by the pressing dangers facing us. His situation was, therefore, more difficult from a political point of view than was that of his predecessors; but I am obliged to confess that I often regretted the civilian Ministers with whom I had to deal in the critical hours of 1914 and during the year 1915; these men did not hesitate to assume responsibility, they protected my liberty of action and accepted with stolid indifference not only the attacks which impatient members of Parliament made directly against themselves, but those directed through them at me.

For some time after General Roques took office, he and I lived on a footing of great cordiality; we were both graduates of the Polytechnic, both had served in the Engineers, and the recollections of our campaigns in Indo-China gave to this cordiality a touch of affectionate comradeship.

During the months of May and June, when the crisis at Verdun again took on a critical aspect, which, to the eyes of the politicians, formed a notable contrast with the apparent immobility of the British, there arose in both the Senate and the Chamber an increasing sentiment of dissatisfaction, leading to numerous meetings in secret committee. These were held between June 16th and 22nd for the Chamber and between July 4th and 9th for the Senate.

It is not my intention to describe what took place during these sessions, concerning which I was kept informed by M. Philippe Berthelot, M. Briand's right-hand man. He came to lunch with me from time to time, and from him I learned of what was going on in political circles. These meetings in secret committee offered M. Briand the occasion

for making many excellent speeches, which brought him large majorities when the voting took place.

Nevertheless, the resolution passed at the close of these discussions in the Chamber contained a dangerous provision. It was decided to "appoint a committee, which, with the Government's assistance, would be charged with examining and verifying the operations of the various services whose mission it was to provide for the needs of the army." It was true that the Chamber declared its intention to refrain strictly from any intervention in the planning of operations or their direction or execution, but once the door was open for Parliamentary investigation no one could say where it would end (the events of 1917 proved this).

I wish here to recall the letter I wrote on June 26, 1915, to the Minister of War and which, if I had to write it again today, I would find no reason to change. It ended with these words: "The Commander-in-Chief is responsible to the Government, who can replace him if they do not approve of his actions. There can exist no other control during a war."<sup>4</sup>

What I feared, not for myself, but for the higher interests of the army, was the undermining of discipline which would result from indiscreet conversations between ill-informed officers, or those anxious to put themselves forward, and Members of Parliament visiting the front in the capacity of Control Commissioners. Besides this, although the Chamber of Deputies had declared that it had no intention of interfering in the conduct of operations, I, nevertheless, began to feel more and more hampered in the exercise of my command.

An important instance was presented in regard to the selection of general officers to fill important posts. I considered that my responsibility to the country required that I should be left to follow the dictates of my conscience in selecting these men, but a slow and unfortunate evolution had been taking place in regard to this question. Under M. Millerand, all my recommendations for promotions were accepted without modification; under General Gallieni, certain names which I offered were struck out, but they were not replaced by others, thus leaving me free to propose other men in the place of those whose appointment had been refused; but when General Roques arrived at the rue St. Dominique, my propositions were sent back with names struck out and others substituted in their place.

This interference of the Government in the assignment of general officers, which, as will be seen further on, continued to increase, came to a head in a letter which the Minister of War sent me on March 23,

<sup>4</sup> Part III, Chapter V, page 397.





1916. In it he expressed his urgent desire that I should remove Generals Dubail, de Langle, de Villaret and d'Urbal from their commands and that I place General Gérard at the head of an army.<sup>5</sup>

On March 25th, I wrote General Dubail the following letter, in which I endeavoured to attenuate the severity of the measure imposed upon me by the Minister:

In accordance with the Bill now before Parliament having in view the rejuvenation of the list of officers, the Government has decided to relieve from their command at the front those general officers who have passed the age limits as recently fixed. I have, therefore, been formally directed to apply this decision to your case and without delay. I am profoundly sorry to have to do it.

After expressing to the Government the deep regret which I feel at losing you, I recalled the eminent services which you have rendered the army and the country in the course of your long and fruitful career. I pointed out the important and glorious part which you have performed during the twenty months of this struggle, and the many proofs of gratitude which you have earned. I, therefore, asked that your military talents and your untiring activity should continue to be used in the service of the country.

In accordance with my request, the Government has indicated that it intends to appoint you Military Governor of Paris and confide to you the responsibility for the defence of the Capital. I am perfectly sure that in this new and important position you will show yourself the same admirable chief and devoted servant of your country that you have always been.

As for myself, I shall never cease to carry with me the recollection of our intimate collaboration; I can only express to you once more my profound gratitude.

Your nomination will appear at the end of the week.

J. JOFFRE.

On March 28th I received the following reply, in which General Dubail accepted his sentence with noble dignity:<sup>6</sup>

Dear General,

I first beg to thank you for the affectionate terms by which you seek to lessen the bitterness I feel at having to give up my command, and I am deeply grateful for the kind and generous references you make to the services I have rendered.

I would have been happy to stay with you until our country had been set free, but I am obliged to bow to the decision which covers my case.

I gratefully accept the appointment as Military Governor of Paris which, upon your suggestion, the Government has been kind enough to confer upon me. As in the past I will do everything I can to fill this post satisfactorily. Please believe, . . .

<sup>5</sup> Personal File of the Commander-in-Chief, Vol. II, Folder 3, Document 74.

<sup>6</sup> Personal File of the Commander-in-Chief, Volume II, Folder 3, Document 75.

On March 31, 1916, I replaced Dubail as Commander of the Eastern Group of Armies by General Franchet d'Esperey commanding the Fifth Army.

General de Langle accepted the news of his retirement with equal dignity. I took advantage of a tour which I made to the east of France with General Cadorna to bestow upon him the *Médaille Militaire*, as a final recompense for the services he had rendered his country and as a mark of the esteem in which he was held by all. The ceremony took place at Châlons on March 29th, and as I pinned the medal on de Langle's breast and embraced him, I felt profoundly affected. Night was falling as the troops marched past their old Commander, and there was a touch of chivalry in his bearing which penetrated all who witnessed this scene, foreigners as well as French—General Cadorna, his staff and several Servian officers then with the Fourth Army.

Apart from the commanders of armies and groups of armies, Parliament now began to occupy itself with officers of less importance—those who in various ways had excited the animosity of the politicians: General Pellé, Colonel Buat, formerly M. Millerand's chief of Cabinet, Lieutenant-Colonel Bel, chief of my Personnel Bureau. The legend had arisen that headquarters at Chantilly had become a place where officers thought more of amusing themselves than of carrying on the war.<sup>7</sup> Surprise had been expressed that the number of officers there had so largely increased since the front had become stabilized, a fact which seemed inadmissible to those ignorant of the situation.

I will not stoop to give statistics regarding this matter; it suffices to say that the increase in the number of staff officers during the war of position became a necessity, not only in the large units but in the smallest. This arose more especially from the extension given to some of the services of the rear, which at the opening of the campaign had little importance but which necessarily grew with every month that the war

<sup>7</sup> I naturally cannot guarantee the virtue of the 300 officers of all grades who made up my headquarters. All I can say is that in my immediate entourage, officers were at their desks from 7 in the morning until 11 in the evening, and that some of them, such as General Pellé, passed most of the night at work.

I might here give a personal detail illustrating the luxury which was alleged to reign amongst us. On January 1, 1916, I had invited to luncheon the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, General Gallieni, the Commanders of Groups of Armies, and Sir Douglas Haig. Major Flutter, General Haig's A.D.C. inquired of Major Thouzellier, my orderly officer, as to the organization of my personal establishment and my table, saying that the British Commander-in-Chief desired to copy it, as he felt that Sir John French's way of living was too expensive and luxurious. Sir Douglas desired to imitate the simplicity which he had noticed in my surroundings.

lasted. I am certain that if a comparison is made between the number of staff officers which we maintained and those present at the various Allied and enemy headquarters, it will be found that, taking into account the respective strengths of the armies, French G.H.Q. was more modestly mounted and did harder work than was the case elsewhere.

These are examples taken from a mass of petty, ill-intentioned and incorrect rumours, to which I would have attached no importance, except that, becoming spread abroad in a country where almost everybody's nerves were on edge, they tended to irritate the public mind and cause doubts and fears to arise.

On July 7th, while the Senate secret committee was in session, the Minister of War came to see me. After asking for some details regarding operations then under way on the Somme, he put several questions to me touching the two matters most dear to the politician's heart, viz., control and verification by Parliament and the number of officers on duty at G.H.Q. I replied that I would give my attention to them, but I considered that the moment was ill-chosen for the application of the measures which Parliament had in view, the battle of the Somme having just begun and demanding all of my attention.

Since General Roques' entry into the Cabinet, he had come to believe himself possessed of exceptional political talents, and in leaving he gave me this advice: "I understand politicians very well," he said; "the thing to do is to seem always to agree with them, never flatly opposing them in anything. I always yield in little matters; in this way they go away satisfied."

"That's very clever," I answered, "but when you no longer have any little matters on which to yield, you will have to begin to yield on the big ones, and when they have got out of you all they want on the big ones, they will fire you!"\*

General Roques' method, which gave him so much satisfaction, was not mine.

It has doubtless been noticed throughout this recital with what persistence I tried to have my rights and prerogatives respected; I did not do this through pride or personal vanity, but because I considered it simple good sense that when a man accepted responsibility he should retain all the means which would enable him to carry the burden. I have already related, in a chapter dealing with the battle of the Somme,

\* In reporting this conversation Marshal Joffre uses the familiar "tu" throughout.—Translator.



the incident which arose between Roques and myself regarding the President's trip to Verdun. The privilege of accompanying members of the Government when they visited the front, which I had so vigorously defended, seemed to me all the more necessary since, a few days before, I had had proof of how dangerous it became if this rule was neglected; the general trend of politics caused me to be more and more wary of the importunate interference of politicians in the conduct of my operations.

On July 17th, on my return from the Somme, where I had gone with the President, I sent General Roques a letter dealing with the matter of Parliamentary control. At this time, the Chamber was discussing a report presented by M. André Tardieu, in which he proposed the creation of a commission, composed of thirty members, which would be charged with control at the front, leaving to the army committee the control of the interior and of the zone in rear of the armies.

It was this plan which I discussed with the Minister in my letter. I told him that I could not admit that members of Parliament were free to come into the zone of the armies without my being *previously informed*, as far as regards the zone beyond rail-head and the zone of the rear, and without my being *consulted* for the zone of the front.

I refused to admit that these delegations should be accompanied by officers taken from the interior and chosen by the Deputies themselves. I, moreover, laid down the principle that operations of control should take place by services and not by armies; by this I meant that it was myself who was to be the object of the proceeding and not my subordinates.

I greatly doubted that members of Parliament would respect the frontier which they themselves had traced between the services, where they would exercise the function of verification and control, and the conduct of operations, which (as they themselves recognized) lay entirely without their province. This fear quickly proved itself well founded.

On June 26th, the report of the M. Abel Ferry, who had made an inspection at Verdun, was transmitted to me. This document was filled from end to end with observations regarding operations. It was replete with suggestions as to our defensive organizations, and entered into a discussion as to the value of their existing location. And yet, nothing had ever occurred to prove the military competence of M. Abel Ferry!

On August 1st I sent General Pellé to Paris to have a talk with General Roques and General Graziani, his chief of staff, regarding this matter.

I gave him two letters in which I set forth my point of view and proposed a solution.<sup>1</sup>

In the first, I made the following proposition for the application of the plan offered in Parliament on July 27th: "The Chamber of Deputies may delegate to its committees the powers requisite for an effective control on the spot of the armies at the front". . . etc., this control being exercised in conformity with the resolution passed on June 22nd. I recalled that the control would bear upon "the services whose function it was to supply the army's needs; it would carefully refrain from any intervention in questions touching the conception, direction or execution of military operations."

In the second letter I answered one received from the Minister of War, in which he had expressed the wish to be informed without delay concerning the way the services functioned at the front, and his desire to have inquiries made which would enable him to reply to questions which Parliament would address to him. I stated that it was my intention to place General Bélin, Inspector-General of Services at G.H.Q. in charge of all questions concerning Parliamentary control. I added:

When you have notified me that a delegation desires to make an inspection of any particular service in one or more armies, the Inspector-General of Services will get in touch with the chairman of the delegation, so as to make arrangements with him as to when and how the operations of the delegation can be carried out. Every facility will be given, without restriction, other than that imposed by the military situation existing at the time.

The Inspector-General of Services will designate the officer who is to accompany the delegation, or, in important cases, he will go himself.

It should be understood that in the zone of the rear and that forward of rail-head, it is sufficient for me to be informed that the delegation has started, for the necessary orders to be given. On the other hand, in regard to the zone of the front, it is indispensable, as it has heretofore always been recognized, that I should be consulted in advance each time that a delegation desires to effect operations of control in this zone. I will immediately inform you whether the military situation makes this possible.

That evening General Pellé returned from Paris. His impressions as to General Roques' attitude were distinctly discouraging.

"Parliamentary control means my control," he had said to Pellé, and this formula proved that the confusion between the executive and the legislative powers was increasing. General Pellé also brought me a letter from the Minister which set forth in embarrassed terms his intention of giving free rein to members of Parliament sent on missions to the front.

<sup>1</sup> Letters 151 and 152, dated August 1, 1916.

Paris, August 1, 1916.

From The Minister of War

To The Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies.

Resolutions just passed by the Senate and Chamber of Deputies indicate the intention of Parliament to exercise through its Commissions a control of all the services, whether at the front or in the interior. Military operations are excluded; but it is evident that the two Chambers are determined to assure themselves that every material precaution has been taken, not only in the matter of our defensive organization, but for the proper execution of our offensives. On the other hand, in his statements to both Houses, the Prime Minister declared that Parliamentary control could not extend to the command of the armies, for which the Government alone was responsible to Parliament.

Two results ensue from this situation:

1. The Parliamentary delegates will have authority to make investigations of all the services at the front. Even if the official object of their mission does not extend to the matter of operations, they will gather in the course of their visits, whether we like it or not, information of a military nature which they will certainly use in their conversations with members of the Government or at committee meetings, during their speeches in the House, or when secret sessions are being held.

2. For this reason, which is the second of the consequences just referred to, the Government—which in this case means the Minister of War—must be kept constantly informed of what is going on at the front and be in a position to gather at any moment information that it may not possess.

Thus informed, he will be in a position to enlighten the Cabinet and Members of Parliament and can answer fully any questions or interpellations addressed to him. As things now stand, these conditions, in regard to information, are not sufficiently fulfilled.

In order that they may be, it is essential that there should be created at the War Ministry an organ which might be entitled "General Inspection of Services," the personnel of which would collect information on the spot and accompany control commissions in their visits.

To avoid duplication, this inspection office might absorb the one that is now operating at your headquarters under the orders of General Bélin; all that would have to be done would be for him to move his office to Paris and complete its personnel by taking, if necessary, men from the Service of the Rear. General Bélin and his officers would likewise be available for making such inspections as you might desire to confide to them.

In regard to military operations, it would be sufficient to enlarge the methods we adopted when I was called upon to answer interpellations regarding the battle of Verdun; Colonel Valantin, assisted by the necessary officers, was kept constantly informed, so as to be able to advise me. Colonel Valantin, of course, would retain his present functions of assistant to the Chief of Staff.

Officers accompanying Parliamentary delegates to the front would draw up reports, one copy of which would be sent to you; you would also receive

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a copy of reports made by the members of the Commission, and it would become your duty to send me your comments upon the statements contained in them.

This information system, comprising the Inspector-General of Services and a representative of the General Staff, would be reinforced by personal inspections of the various services conducted by their respective assistant secretaries and by the Minister.

I request you to inform me whether you can place General Bélin at my disposal under the conditions suggested, at the same time sending me a list of the officers who might be designated to assist him.

The details of the inspection organization could be worked out at once by General Bélin and your principal assistants.

On the afternoon of the next day, August 2nd, I handed M. Briand the text of a letter which I intended to send the Minister of War in reply to the one just quoted. I preferred to treat this question directly with the Prime Minister because his profound knowledge of Parliament would enable him to estimate far better than could Roques the danger involved in the solutions proposed by the latter. In fact, I had more confidence in Briand than in Roques.

G.H.Q., August 2, 1916.

From The Commander-in-Chief  
To The Minister of War.

In your letter of August 1st you informed me of the organization which you propose for effecting a control by the Government (that is, by the Minister of War) and by Parliament, of the armies at the front.

Before examining, as you request me to do, the method of applying this double control during the course of operations, I believe it is indispensable to point out the limits which should be imposed upon it, if the exercise of military command and the defence of the country are not to be compromised.

These limits seem to me clearly defined in the Resolutions passed by the Chamber of Deputies on June 22nd, the speech made by the Prime Minister during the debate on M. Tardieu's resolution and the whole tenor of the discussion.

The conception, direction and execution of operations were excluded by Parliament itself from Parliamentary control; and yet you state that "the two Chambers are determined to assure themselves that every material precaution has been taken not only in the matter of our defensive organization but for the proper execution of our offensives."

It seems evident that the Parliamentary delegates can obtain these assurances only by a complete knowledge of the distribution of the resources placed at the Commander-in-Chief's disposal, by an examination of the objectives he has in view and by closely following the measures he is taking to attain them. All these are matters belonging essentially to the conduct of opera-

tions, and I believe that to authorize the communication of such information would result in grave danger to the defence of the country.

You also inform me that to enable you to furnish Parliament with all the information it may demand and answer all questions of a military nature which may be asked, you have decided to create an organ of the General Staff whose duty it will be to keep you constantly informed regarding operations. It is essential that there should be no misunderstanding in this matter.

I am ready, as I have always been, to place at your disposal all information concerning past operations. I am likewise ready to furnish you *personally* any explanation that you may desire; but if I am to be subjected to a permanent supervision, if, in addition to the grave responsibility which I now have to bear, I must constantly give explanations to the Government and justify in its eyes the decisions I am taking, I cannot consent to it. Such a requirement would rob me of that liberty of thought and action of which I have absolute need.

Moreover, unless I relinquish the authority which I must possess over the army services, I cannot submit their acts, to any greater extent than now exists, to the investigation of a permanent inspection functioning under your direct orders and wholly escaping my authority, as you propose.

Up to the present the Government has given me its confidence; if it desires to continue it, I request that I should not be subjected to the constant and detailed tutelage of the Minister of War.

On the other hand, if I no longer enjoy the full confidence of the Government, I ask to be relieved of a responsibility which I can no longer fulfil under the new conditions proposed.

I read this letter to the Prime Minister and explained to him that my conscience forbade me to accept the tutelage to which the Minister of War wished to subject me, and which, in my opinion, would have most disastrous consequences.

After listening with the greatest attention, M. Briand expressed himself as fully in agreement with me. He decided without hesitation to intervene with General Roques, whom he expected to meet the next morning at a Cabinet Council. He promised to see to it that General Roques changed the terms of the letter he had sent me, adding, as I left, "I cannot have any conflict between you and the Minister of War." Matters, therefore, remained where my previous propositions had left them.

On August 4th I left Chantilly to accompany the President of the Republic, the President of the Senate and the Minister of War on a visit to the Somme. At Camprémy, M. Poincaré reviewed the 2nd Cavalry Division and presented a standard to the Light Regiment of this division. At Esquennoy he witnessed a trial of a new anti-aircraft gun. During the afternoon he presented decorations, inspected the hos-

pital at Cerisy and saw several command posts. But what constituted for me the most interesting part of this visit was that it gave me an opportunity of discussing with the President of the Republic and the President of the Senate the matter of Parliamentary control, to which the Minister of War had endeavoured to give so unfortunate a solution. M. Poincaré, as was his habit, did not commit himself. Nevertheless, I received the impression that he was favourable to my thesis. M. Antonin Dubost unhesitatingly gave it his approval. General Roques, who probably had already been hauled over the coals by the Prime Minister, realized that he had lost his case; and his ill humour was evident.

The *status quo ante* was thus maintained, it being agreed that the letter of August 1st would be considered annulled, both as concerned the plan of establishing General Bélin in Paris and the liaison to be maintained through Colonel Valantin. But the Minister maintained his right to be kept fully informed; while not contesting this, I pointed out that in matters having to do with past events, he could obtain information through a liaison officer of his own staff, who would be free to visit the front, accompanied by one of my officers; however, for matters in course of preparation, he must continue to receive his information only from me; this I would furnish through the intermediary of Colonel Pénelon and Major Herbillon.

Roques yielded before this firmly expressed determination, and obtaining no support from the President of the Republic and finding himself frankly disapproved of by the President of the Senate, he did not insist any further.

The question was definitely settled a few days afterwards when a written formula was established which was to be handed to all Parliamentary delegates before they started for the front. It was agreed with the Prime Minister that the delegates would address their requests to the Minister of War, who would transmit them to me; I would remain the sole judge as to whether these visits were opportune or not.

If I have gone into details of these incidents, which seem insignificant enough in comparison with the great events which were taking place at the moment, it is because this interference of members of Parliament was susceptible of bringing about the gravest consequences. It was essential that my authority should remain unimpaired. If it was weakened, the result would be to delay or compromise a victory which I could already foresee, and which had cost us so dearly that I felt it must not be exposed to the dangers of base intrigues and political quarrels.

Roumania's entrance into the war had very naturally excited much enthusiasm throughout the country for the arrival of these fresh reinforcements seemed the presage of approaching victory. The disappointment was all the greater when she was overwhelmed by an unbroken series of disasters. The change of fortune appeared inexplicable to the public, and resulted in a condition of irritability easy to understand. The newspapers naturally reflected this state of nerves, while in Parliament the men who formerly had found fault with me for corresponding directly with Allied Commanders-in-Chief, and in this way infringing upon the Government's prerogatives, now took me to task for having failed to ensure co-ordination in the Entente's operations.

It was in this atmosphere that the question of the command of the Allied armies at Salonika came to the fore. I have already several times pointed out that it was bound to arise, from the very moment that the Government nominated General Sarrail to the command of the Army of the Near East. His appointment was made without consulting me and the difficulties which resulted from it have been described; they arose more especially from the dislike manifested by the British at seeing themselves subordinated to a general who had given no indications on the Western front of having any particular ability. The necessity for a solution became imperative when the violent incidents which I have already mentioned took place between General Sarrail and General Cordonnier. The only sensible procedure was to consider the question as a purely military one, which it was, and not make of it a political affair.

This pitfall the Government did not succeed in avoiding, or, to say exactly what I think, did not desire to avoid. When I told the Minister of War of my intention to make an investigation of Sarrail's conduct, General Roques, as has been related, obtained from the Government authority to conduct the inquiry in person. Now the decree of December 15th had explicitly placed the commander of the Army of the Near East under my orders, and I was not slow in perceiving the danger of any such procedure, opening the door as it would to political intervention in military affairs. If, as has been seen in the chapter devoted to this affair, I did not categorically refuse to accept the solution offered by the Minister of War, it was because M. Briand urged me to accept it. He told me that he desired as much as I did to have exact information as to the situation at Salonika; "but let me attend to this," he said, "I have a plan in view. If the inquiry, as I anticipate, proves unfavourable

to Sarraïl, I will take upon myself the responsibility of getting rid of him." I, therefore, yielded.

In spite of the reports made by Major Requin upon his return from Salonika, in spite of the complaints made by the Russians, the Italians and the British, in spite of the most unfortunate impression produced throughout the Army of the Near East by the violent discussions in full public view, between Sarraïl and Cordonnier, and in which all the fault was not on Cordonnier's side, General Roques, on returning from the Near East, declared that General Sarraïl had performed his duty in a perfectly satisfactory manner, that it would be an injustice to recall him, and that nothing was required except to reinforce his staff.

I was powerless in the face of this judgment, since I had agreed in advance to the procedure of which it was the conclusion. But General Roques had brought about a situation which M. Briand certainly had not anticipated.

The campaign being waged in Parliament received a fresh impetus from this incident, furnishing proof, as it seemed to do, of fresh dissension between the Minister and myself. Echoes of the agitation reached me from numerous sources. A plan was already on foot for holding a new meeting in secret committee for the purpose of discussing the events in Roumania (which were taking on a graver aspect each day), the operations on the Somme and the question of our losses; to these matters would naturally now be added the one touching the command of the Army of the Near East.

On November 24th, I had full confirmation of these rumours, when the Prime Minister and General Roques came to lunch with me in the rue Michel-Ange. Both Ministers considered the internal political situation to be rather serious; but while M. Briand was confident of successfully meeting this new crisis, General Roques was less optimistic. Both, however, were sure that the High Command would feel the effects of the assault which Parliament was preparing.

A Secret Session was voted, and its meeting was fixed for November 28th. I now learned that during the Cabinet meeting at which General Roques had reported the result of his visit to Salonika, he had spoken in frankly eulogistic terms of General Sarraïl, alleging the insufficiency of his staff as the sole cause of such shortcomings as had been observed. By way of conclusion, General Roques suggested that the Army of the Near East should be withdrawn from my control, adding that he had in preparation a decree modifying the one of December, 1915.

At the next meeting of the Cabinet which took place on November



27th, that is, on the eve of the meeting in Secret Committee, he submitted this decree for approval. By its terms the direction of the war passed to the hands of the Minister of War; he alone would be qualified to apportion resources to the various theatres, approve plans of operation and appoint commanders of armies. The projected reform reduced the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army to his former status of commander of the Armies of the North-East.

When it came to a vote, the Cabinet decided unanimously (with the exception of one ballot) that the decree of December 5, 1915, should remain in force and that I should continue to exercise all the functions it conferred upon me. General Roques also offered a proposition whereby groups of armies would be suppressed. This also was rejected. M. Briand then formally undertook the task of defending the High Command before the Secret Committee.

However, General Roques succeeded in having General Pellé and Lieutenant-Colonel Bélin, against whom the politicians had shown themselves most violent, relieved from G.H.Q. and ordered to the command of troops. General de Castelnau was to go to Russia to attend the conference fixed for December; but upon his return he was not to be sent back to G.H.Q.

The results of this meeting were reported to me at one o'clock, shortly after my return from Verdun. I immediately left for Paris; for I wished to see M. Malvy, who, the day before, had asked me to make him this visit. The Minister of the Interior assured me that the Government would do everything in its power to support me, and that, as far as he was personally concerned, I could fully count upon him.

On December 1st, accompanied by General de Castelnau, I went to Paris in response to a request from the President of the Republic. We went over a number of questions together, amongst others the organization of the High Command; but our talk bore especially upon the various military men who were in the bad graces of the politicians. Besides General Pellé and Colonel Bel, they had demanded the head of de Castelnau, likewise that of Foch. Foch's health was made the subject of false and exaggerated rumours, and the criticism of him was intense.

The conversations which I had at this time with the various members of the Government gave me the impression that they themselves were not at all clear as to what they wanted done. While M. Malvy said that it was fully decided to make a defence of the High Command, General Roques declared that it was essential to give some satisfaction to Par-

liament, yielding on minor points, especially as to the removal of certain officers from G.H.Q.

The inclinations of the Minister of War followed a capricious curve, reflecting the successive impressions produced upon him during the meetings in secret session, then going on. On the 29th MM. Abrami and Tardieu made violent speeches against the High Command and on the 30th the Chamber loudly applauded when the name of General Sarrail was pronounced during a speech of the Minister of War; but on December 1st M. Briand produced a profound impression when he showed the inextricable difficulties which confronted me in my efforts to obtain co-ordination in the Allied operations. That evening the general impression was optimistic, and it was supposed that the debate would quickly close. December 2nd was particularly calm, the Secret Committee discussing merely maritime questions. The Prime Minister was not present. General de Castelnau, who had just been officially appointed to represent the French Army during the meeting at Russian G.H.Q., came to see me regarding his approaching journey.

But while Parliament was thus deliberating, serious events were taking place in Greece. Telegrams arriving from Athens stated that fighting was going on in the streets, and that once more French blood was flowing. Detachments of sailors had been traitorously attacked and some sixty dead were reported. It looked as though Admiral Dartige du Fournet had not immediately taken the measures which the dignity of his country and the safety of its soldiers required.

On the morning of December 3rd new details arrived. Not only had our men been killed, but a blow had been dealt our prestige which threatened to be irreparable; for the Government appeared unwilling to exact of King Constantine the measures which our honour and safety required. Two Governments existed at this time in Greece, one fighting against us and the other with us, and no further hesitation ought to have been possible. That day I received a telegram from General Sarrail breathing exactly the right spirit and demanding authorization to attack Larissa immediately. After talking the matter over with General Pellé, I decided to go and see the Prime Minister, show him Sarrail's telegram, whose terms I fully approved, and inform him of the energetic measures which I proposed to take.

M. Briand received me at 11.45 a.m. As a result of our discussion, a telegram was sent General Sarrail ordering him not to undertake any operation against Larissa without instructions from the Government; but he was informed that the 60th Division and the 16th Colonial Division,

then on the sea, would be landed at the Piraeus instead of at Salonika. This matter being settled, M. Briand took me to lunch where we discussed politics.

To my great surprise, he told me that the situation in Parliament was causing him great uneasiness; he saw only one solution that could restore calm, and that was a drastic re-organization in the High Command. If this were not effected, the Government would fall, and the resulting condition would be serious, since no other political combination could be made to work. Moreover, the fall of the Ministry would bring about a crisis in the conduct of operations. This double danger must be avoided if possible. M. Briand appealed to my patriotism to save the Government by accepting the modifications he proposed, and he ended by declaring that if he went before the Secret Committee of the Chamber the next day without being able to announce this reform, the Government would crash.

M. Briand's plan was the following: I would continue to direct the war; I would have a staff, and the representatives of the Allied Armies would be accredited to me. I would no longer directly command the Armies of the North-East, they being confided to a general officer who would be designated only after I had given my opinion as to the man best suited for the task. In short, I would have general direction of the war, the general-in-chief of our Armies of the North-East and the commander of the Army of the Near East, both being subject to my orders. My headquarters would be in Paris, where I would be in close and constant contact with the Government. To reinforce my authority, I was to be created Marshal of France. This promotion, M. Briand told me, would soon be announced.

These propositions were a complete revelation to me, as nothing in previous conversations had led me to suppose that such a plan was being evolved by the Government. I answered the Prime Minister that I was a soldier and, as such, I was ready to acquiesce in any decisions of the Government; I had too long practised obedience not to be willing to accept the new duty required of me. However, I hoped it would be understood that I had not suggested the changes which my acceptance of the marshal's baton seemed to sanction; such was not the case. I saw grave reasons against the proposed plan and I merely submitted to its being put into operation.

At first glance there is no doubt that the project appeared entirely logical. The officer at the head of an army corps ought not directly to

command one of his divisions, and it would seem normal that the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies should not himself command the armies operating in the North-eastern theatre. But this logic was only apparent. There was such a disproportion between our forces in the North-East of France and those in the Orient, that the Commander-in-Chief on the Western theatre was in reality the Commander-in-Chief of France's armies, of which the forces in the Near East constituted merely a detachment. Thus, under pretext of enlarging my authority I was practically being deprived of command.

In the course of these Memoirs I have more than once had occasion to point out—and it is no mere vanity which leads me again to refer to the matter—that what little co-ordination of efforts existed on the various Allied fronts was due to me. I am willing to agree that the prestige ensuing from the Victory of the Marne had much to do with this situation; but the authority which I enjoyed was greatly fortified by the fact that I spoke as Commander-in-Chief of that one of the Allied armies which, if not the most numerous, was at least the most powerful, and the most war-hardened, the army which (why should it not be said?) from the Marne to the Somme had covered itself with a glory approached by none other, the army, in short, which was the principal adversary of our principal enemy—the German Army.

If the command of this army was taken from me, my influence with the other Commanders-in-Chief would be lowered immediately. There being no agreement similar to the one which in April, 1918, conferred the supreme direction of the Allied armies upon General Foch, I would be deprived of that authority which until now had been accorded me. And the man who succeeded me, whoever he might be, would find it a slow and difficult task to create for himself the position which the length of time I had remained in command and the good-will of the Allied generals had conferred upon me. These were the reasons which convinced me that the change now proposed would be unfortunate for France and for the entire Coalition; the disasters of 1917 and the catastrophe which brought us to the verge of definite defeat in the spring of 1918, have since confirmed me in the opinion I expressed to M. Briand on December 3, 1916.

Had the circumstances been different, it is probable that the Prime Minister would have shared my opinion; but I believe it is quite clear that his decision had been already taken. He replied to my observation by saying that he did not ask for an immediate answer on my part, but

he did desire one before the meeting of the Cabinet, fixed for 9 o'clock the following morning.

Incidentally, I expressed the wish to keep General Pellé with me. In my whole career I have never known a man of such breadth of view, subtle comprehension and penetrating intelligence as Pellé, and to these qualities he joined a capacity for work that was simply prodigious. If to this he added tact, persuasiveness, and a loyalty that was proof against any snare, a fair idea can be formed of the magnificent officer who for years had served at my side and whose services I now desired to keep.

M. Briand knew Pellé and shared my opinion of him; but he said that it was no longer possible to reverse the decision taken in his case: General Pellé would have to be appointed to the command of troops. This is the way politicians apply the principle of putting the right man in the right place.

We also discussed the case of General de Castelnau. The President of the Republic, a few days before, had given me to understand that a large number of Deputies wished him to be sent away from G.H.Q. I, therefore, asked M. Briand what would become of him when he returned from Russia. The Prime Minister answered that the Right parties of the Chamber demanded that de Castelnau should be given command of a group of armies; he, personally, was in favour of this solution, as it would contribute to ensuring his majority, and no objection could be raised, since General de Castelnau was already at the head of a group of armies when, in December, 1915, I brought him to G.H.Q.

I returned to Chantilly at half-past five. During the evening, M. Etienne telephoned to inquire if I could receive him at 7 o'clock the next morning. When he arrived, he told me that the evening before M. Briand, who knew the friendship which existed between us, had asked him to use his influence to induce me to consent to the proposal which the Prime Minister had made me, and Etienne appealed to my patriotism to accept.

I repeated to him what I had said to M. Briand: I was at the Government's orders; I would accept the measure proposed; but I refused to recommend or suggest it in any way whatsoever, so clearly were its disadvantages apparent to my mind.

M. Etienne declared himself satisfied, and an hour later left me to carry my answer to M. Briand. I also had a telephone message sent to the latter, saying that M. Etienne was on his way with my reply. Nevertheless, about 9 a.m. the Prime Minister telephoned, saying he wished to know from me, before the meeting of the Cabinet started, whether

I consented. I told him that I did. He then repeated his statement that I would shortly be raised to the dignity of Marshal.

A few pages back I had said that the Government's plan was theoretically logical, that the direction of operations on all the fronts where French troops were engaged was a large enough task for any one man, and that good reasons existed for separating it from the work of commanding the armies on the North-eastern front; this separation would leave me free to concentrate myself entirely upon the large and complicated problem of the general conduct of operations. Nevertheless, I realized that the new organization, thus far only laid down as a principle, would have little value unless properly applied; my most serious preoccupation, therefore, was to see that my functions were clearly defined. This became all the more necessary when it was taken into account that the Ministry which had devised this organization was most insecure, and there was reason to fear that if the existing political confusion continued it would have a dangerous effect upon the command of our armies.

The afternoon following our conversation, M. Briand made a speech in secret session. He announced that the Government had decided to introduce reforms in the High Command, but the few details he gave—intentionally, perhaps, in order to leave himself free to manœuvre—caused violent scenes in the House.

Meantime, I had been studying how best to organize the staff I would require for my new functions. For chief of staff I decided upon Colonel Gamelin, who had long been with me, and whose character, intelligence, industry and great powers of assimilation I knew I could count upon. I immediately brought him to G.H.Q., intending to make him a general and give him the post.

The staff was to be composed of only a few officers; naturally those who at Chantilly had been occupied with exterior theatres of operations would form part of it. In addition, I intended to create a bureau charged especially with questions of a civil nature.

The secret session ended on the afternoon of December 7th, after a vote of confidence in the Ministry had been passed; but this was obtained by a very feeble majority. I learned at the same time that the Ministry would probably be re-organized and that it had been decided to modify the High Command in the sense indicated by M. Briand.

The meetings of the secret session had disclosed a general uneasiness, and the nervousness of Parliament had been increased by a phrase

dropped by the Prime Minister in which he alluded to the possibility of making peace. A feeling of discouragement seemed to have infected the mass of the people; the terrible trials they had passed through in 1916 and the disappointment following upon the Roumanian disaster, prevented them from comprehending all that we had accomplished during the year and the precarious position of our enemies. The Parliament, backed by the President of the Republic, not perceiving as I did the progress we had made on the road to victory, had reached the unfortunate conclusion that they must prevent at any cost the execution of the plans I had formed for the opening of 1917. In other words, at the very moment when we held the Germans by the throat and were making ready to deal them a blow which, I still believe, would have been decisive my relief from the conduct of operations was devised as an indirect method of arresting the stroke.

It was in this atmosphere of uncertainty, weariness and doubt that M. Briand apprised me of his intention of recasting his Cabinet, with the idea of giving a much needed stimulation to the country, and on December 9th the Government resigned. It was rumoured that General Lyautey would become Minister of War in the new combination, and that Admiral Lacaze intended to withdraw.

The Admiral's departure seemed to me profoundly regrettable, for on many occasions I had been in a position to estimate the great value of the services he was rendering. It was for this reason that on December 11th I sent General Pellé to ask him in my name to reconsider his decision. Admiral Lacaze replied: "I have agreed to stay, for my departure under existing circumstances would amount to desertion. But if the Cabinet finds itself obliged to give certain guarantees expected of it, I shall not remain at the price of what I regard as treachery."

As for the choice of Lyautey as Minister of War, it met with my hearty approval.

On December 12th M. Briand asked me to come to Paris for the purpose of definitely arranging with him the modifications in the High Command of which I have spoken above. It was decided that upon his return from Russia, General de Castelnau would be given command of the Northern Group of Armies, taking the place of General Foch, who would be charged with studying and preparing a plan for meeting a German offensive through Switzerland, a move which had been much talked of for some time. General Pellé, notwithstanding my renewed insistence, was assigned to the command of a division, I having failed to

obtain for him an army corps. In addition, the removal of General Desprès from command of the Army Detachment of Lorraine and of General Villaret from that of the Seventh Army was announced to me as imminent.<sup>10</sup>

I likewise learned that General Lyautey would become Minister of War, his place in Morocco being filled by General Gouraud; General Roques would be appointed to the command of the Fourth Army, vacated by Gouraud.

We then took up the question of the new organization for the direction of the war. M. Briand said nothing which could cause me to suppose that he had modified the intentions already expressed to me on that subject; he also offered no objections when I spoke of my plans for creating my staff.

On December 13th decrees were published announcing the constitution of the new Cabinet, the creation of the War Committee, the nomination of General Nivelle as Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-East, and my own as "technical adviser" to the Government.

The War Committee consisted of M. Briand, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. Ribot, Minister of Finance, General Lyautey, Minister of War, Admiral Lacaze, Minister of Marine, and M. Albert Thomas, Minister of Armament and War Industries. In regard to myself, the decree dealing with the War Committee stated that "General Joffre, General-in-Chief of the French Armies, will *assist* at the meetings of the War Committee for the purposes of consultation."

As a matter of fact, the newspapers were not in agreement in reporting this paragraph. The *Matin* said "will assist"; the others, "may assist." The difference was not without its importance. Another delicate shade of expression in this decree attached to the words "General Joffre, General-in-Chief of the French Armies," instead of the title which the decree of December, 1915, conferred upon me, "Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies." This expression occurred again in the decree publishing the changes in the High Command, which was worded thus:

The following nominations are announced:

General Joffre, General-in-Chief of the French Armies, technical military adviser of the Government, member of the War Committee for purposes of consultation.

<sup>10</sup> General de Villaret's departure from the Seventh Army had been talked of early in the year. General Roques referred to it in a letter dated March 23, 1916, cited on pages 522 and 523.



General Nivelle, Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North-East.

General Gouraud, French Resident General in Morocco *ad interim*.

Admiral Gauchet, Commander-in-Chief of the naval forces in the Mediterranean.

My impression on reading the newspapers was not agreeable. I felt that the Government had deceived me. This impression was increased when I learned that General Nivelle, the new Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North-East, had been sent for by the Government to come to Paris, without the latter having judged it necessary to advise me. Nivelle left his headquarters at Souilly at 9 a.m. the 13th, after directing his chief of staff, General de Barescut, to inform me by telephone of his departure.

I, therefore, sent for Gamelin, my future chief of staff, and told him that I intended to offer my resignation. However, after long reflection I decided to postpone this decision and I directed General Gamelin to draw up a memorandum which I intended to present to the Prime Minister with the idea of obtaining a clear definition of my future attributions. The note was as follows:

- (1) General Joffre is a *member* of the War Committee; as such he will take part in all its meetings.
- (2) The conduct of operations, properly so speaking, on the front of the armies of the North-East as well as upon the front of the Army of the Near East, falls exclusively within the province of the general commanding in chief the French armies, the rôle of the War Committee being one of general direction.
- (3) No direct relations will be maintained between the War Committee or any member of the Government with either the general commanding the armies of the North-East or the general commanding the army of the Near East; all such relations passing through the general commanding in chief the French armies.
- (4) The same rule will apply to relations between the War Committee or the Government with headquarters of any Allied army, whether directly or through the intermediary of the representatives of Allied Commanders-in-Chief stationed at French G.H.Q.

While this memorandum was being prepared, a telephone message arrived from M. Briand asking me to lunch with him. I accepted, and at noon I arrived at his house. He began by reading me the new decree re-organizing the High Command. It contained the following articles:

Article 1. General Joffre, Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies is appointed technical adviser to the Government for the direction of the war.

Article 2. The Commanders-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and

North-East and of the Army of the Near East will each exercise the direction of operations under the conditions specified in the decree of October 28, 1913, regarding the conduct of large units, and that of December 2, 1913, regarding service in the field.

It will be noticed that this decree referred only to the decrees of 1913, making no mention of the one of December 2, 1915, which gave me command on all the theatres of operations. Under these conditions it could well be asked what really were the functions that were intended to be assigned me.

In the first place, the decree of December 2, 1915, had not been rescinded, and Article 1 of the decree of December 13, 1916, referred to me as "Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies," the title given me by the decree of 1915; in the second place, Article 2 of the new decree prescribed that the Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-East and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Near East would each enjoy, for the direction of his operations, the powers conferred in the decrees of October 28, 1913, and December 2, 1913, and these expressly prohibited the superposition of any military intermediary between the Government and the Commander-in-Chief in the various theatres of operations.

I was, therefore, justified in propounding to the Prime Minister the questions which presumably he had not asked himself, and I took out the memorandum I had prepared just before leaving my headquarters.

M. Briand approved the principle contained in my memorandum, but he requested a delay before definitely settling the matter of my new attributions, since he was now absorbed by the initial duties of his new Cabinet, which was to present itself before the Chamber of Deputies the next day. All of this was accompanied by pleasant words, which, while enabling him to hide his thoughts from me, proved that he was afraid to express them. It was evident that the Government was trying to take from me all real command, and, under the vague appellation of technical adviser, leave standing a mere façade of power, intended to appease the army, the country and our Allies.

On my return to Chantilly I first had prepared the draft of a ministerial circular, which, being based upon the various decrees I have just mentioned, would force the Government to clear up the obscurity which had prevailed ever since the beginning of this Parliamentary crisis. The next morning, December 14th, I had a memorandum written which set forth the problem of the High Command as I conceived it; I also wrote a letter to the Minister of War. These three documents follow. I took

them with me to Paris, where I went the same day to see the Minister of War and the President of the Republic.

### MEMORANDUM.

The decree of December 13, 1916, prescribing the attributions of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North-East and of the Army of the Near East, states that "each will exercise the direction of operations as set down in the decrees of October 28, 1913, and December 2, 1913.

Both of these decrees prescribe that the relations between the Government and Commanders-in-Chief on various theatres shall be *direct* and they give the said commanders exclusive authority in the appointment of the officers within their commands.

Under these circumstances, and taking into consideration these texts alone, General Joffre's authority over the French armies becomes eliminated. It seems essential to know whether this was the Government's intention when it assigned to him merely the rôle of technical adviser, to the exclusion of all power of command, as has been stated in certain newspapers.

On the other hand, the decree of December 2, 1915, which gave General Joffre command of all French armies on all fronts, has not been abrogated. The title "Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies" created by this decree has even been reproduced in the one of December 13, 1916.

The report to the President which precedes the decree of December 2, 1915, states that "actual experience of events now happening in several of the theatres of operations, proves that a single direction, indispensable for the conduct of the war, can only be secured by placing at the head of our armies a single chief, who will be responsible for the conduct of all purely military operations."

Flagrant contradictions, therefore, exist between these texts.

G.H.Q., December 14, 1916.

From The General Commanding-in-Chief the French Armies  
To The Minister of War.

The decree of December 13, 1916, states that the General Commanding-in-Chief the French Armies, whose authority is defined in the decree of December 2, 1915, will perform the duties of technical adviser to the Government for the direction of the war. I consider that Ministerial Instructions should be issued defining the double rôle thus incumbent upon the General Commanding-in-Chief the French Armies; Article 2 of the decree of December 2, 1915, moreover, prescribes that this should be done.

I have the honour to enclose herewith the draft of a Ministerial Instruction intended to accomplish this purpose. It prescribes the conditions which seem to me indispensable to enable the General Commanding-in-Chief the French Armies properly to fulfil the functions prescribed for him and assume the responsibility they involve.

## Draft

of a circular prescribing the method of application of the decrees of December 2, and December 13, 1915.

Article I. The General Commanding-in-Chief the French Armies will attend the meetings of the War Committee as technical adviser of the Government in all that concerns the direction of the war.

He will transmit to the several Commanders-in-Chief all decisions affecting them, and supervise their execution in respect of military operations.

Article II. In consequence, he is charged with the supreme direction of these operations in the various theatres and is responsible therefor.

The Commanders-in-Chief in the various theatres of operations are subject to his orders under the conditions set forth in the decree of December 2, 1915.

Article III. He is charged with co-ordinating the operations of the French Armies with those of the Allied Armies, in conformity with the decisions taken by the War Committee.

To this end, he will maintain the necessary relations with the Commanders-in-Chief of the Allied Armies.

Article IV. For the execution of Article 3, Chapter I of the decree of December 2, 1913, on the service of armies in the field, all appointments to the command of armies and groups of armies will be submitted to him by Commanders-in-Chief in the various theatres of operations.

On the morning of December 14th, I instructed General Pellé to ask Admiral Schwerer, whether Admiral Lacaze, Minister of War *ad interim*, could receive me during the afternoon. I also sent General Pénelon to the Elysée to inquire whether I could see the President during the day. It was agreed that I should visit the Minister at 2.30 p.m. and that the President would receive me at 3 p.m.

The Minister listened attentively to the reading of my memorandum and the draft of the circular, which I had brought with me. He promised to examine the question I had brought up and obtain the Government's decision on it at once.

I then saw M. Poincaré, to whom I likewise explained the need of defining the attributions of the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies. I also pointed out to him the incontestable objection which existed to the solution which the Government seemed to prefer, namely, having the direction of the war confided to the Minister of War. "Admitting," I said, "that a man like Lyautey might fulfil this rôle, does it seem possible that Admiral Lacaze, notwithstanding all his brilliant qualities, could do so? And yet the Admiral is now Minister of War *ad interim* and the direction of the war would fall upon his shoulders. Again, suppose a civilian became Minister of War, what would happen

then? There are orders at this minute which ought to be given, orders upon which future operations depend: who is going to give them—who sign them?”

Throughout the conversation the President scrupulously maintained his constitutional rôle; and he was all the more unwilling to appear to take sides, since he knew that Parliament was divided and in a stormy mood. As I have already said, M. Poincaré was intensely afraid lest operations on the Somme should be resumed at an early date, and the prospect of my removal from the direction of military affairs presented itself as an unhoped-for means of avoiding the very thing he most dreaded. For all these reasons he contented himself with replying that he took note of all I said; but he gave me the impression that he shared my opinion.

Before leaving Paris, I saw M. Briand for a moment. He also preserved a hazy silence. His newly constituted Cabinet had just gone through the trials of a first encounter with the Chamber of Deputies, during which violent speeches had been made against him; nevertheless, he had secured a majority of 314 votes to 165.

In the evening I returned to Chantilly, where General Nivelle, whom I had met at the Ministry of Marine during the afternoon, joined me for dinner. The new Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-East manifested the greatest deference towards me, expressing his gratitude for the unexpected promotion which had just come to him and which he considered he owed to me. But the satisfaction he felt at this rapid advance to the top of the military ladder was tempered by the anxiety he felt at having suddenly to face such redoubtable responsibilities. One would have thought that he already foresaw the difficulties which were soon to overwhelm him in the exercise of his command, and which brought about a fall which proved as sudden as had been his rise.

At eleven o'clock he left for Souilly, where he was to transfer the command of the Second Army to General Guillaumat. He expected to return to Chantilly on the 16th, when he would assume the functions of Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North-East.

On December 15th, my friend, M. Etienne, came to lunch with me at Chantilly. He related many interesting details of the political agitation then at its height; he dwelt especially upon the manœuvres of certain general officers, who had perceived in the crisis just closing an opportunity for satisfying their highest ambitions.

According to M. Etienne, General de Castelnau's activity had been

particularly noticeable. Under pretext of business connected with his trip to Russia, he had made numerous visits to members of Parliament belonging to the Right groups, as well as to Admiral Lacaze, who was performing the duties of Minister of War pending the arrival of General Lyautey. De Castelnau was confident that he could count upon the latter's support, once he had assumed office. He seemed to consider that the functions to which I had assigned him in December, 1915, implied the right of succession to the chief command, and the appointment of General Nivelle to the Armies of the North-East was a severe blow. Lacking anything better, he wanted the command of the Northern Group of Armies, and M. Lasies had circulated a petition amongst the Right groups of the House and Senate requesting that he should be given this post in the place of General Foch. I have already related how the Cabinet, in its desire to rally to itself the votes of these Members, had acceded to this collective request.

The next day, December 16th, General Nivelle returned to Chantilly to take over his new functions. I had already sent General Gamelin and Major Moyrand to Paris to see what arrangements could be made for my installation. The Ecole Militaire at this moment was a vast caravanserai, offering few facilities for housing me, so I decided to establish myself at Neuilly,<sup>11</sup> however inconvenient in some respects this location was.

On the 17th I published a general order announcing the assumption of command by General Nivelle. The same day General de Castelnau, who had received a letter appointing him to the command of a group of armies, left G.H.Q. This *lettre de service* was signed by the President of the Republic, as all those intended for commanders of armies were to be hereafter. This constituted a serious infringement of the prerogatives which the decree of December 2, 1915 (Chap. II, Art. 3), bestowed upon the Commander-in-Chief; it was, above all, an irremediable blow to the principle whose recognition I had with such difficulty obtained from the Government, namely, that the man responsible for the conduct of our armies should have the choice of his subordinates. In taking this step the Government deprived itself of all power to keep the direction of operations free from political interference.

On December 18th I went to Paris to attend a meeting of the War Committee.<sup>12</sup> On returning to Chantilly I found a paper sent me by Admiral Lacaze for examination and comment. It was a draft of the at-

<sup>11</sup> In an hotel in the Avenue Victor-Hugo.

<sup>12</sup> This was its second meeting. The first had been held on December 16th.

tributions it was proposed to confer upon me, and constituted a reply to the draft I had handed the Minister on December 14th. It read as follows:

It will be your duty to prepare such studies, collect such information, give advice on such matters, as the War Committee may request, or that you may consider it appropriate to suggest, with a view to submitting for the consideration of the Government propositions concerning the objects to be attained by the war and the co-ordination of the action of the Allied Armies.

To this end you will have at your disposal a staff organized for the study of military questions.

The propositions you may make, or the opinions you may express concerning French or Allied armies will be submitted by you to the War Committee, which will act upon them directly or after submitting them to the Cabinet.

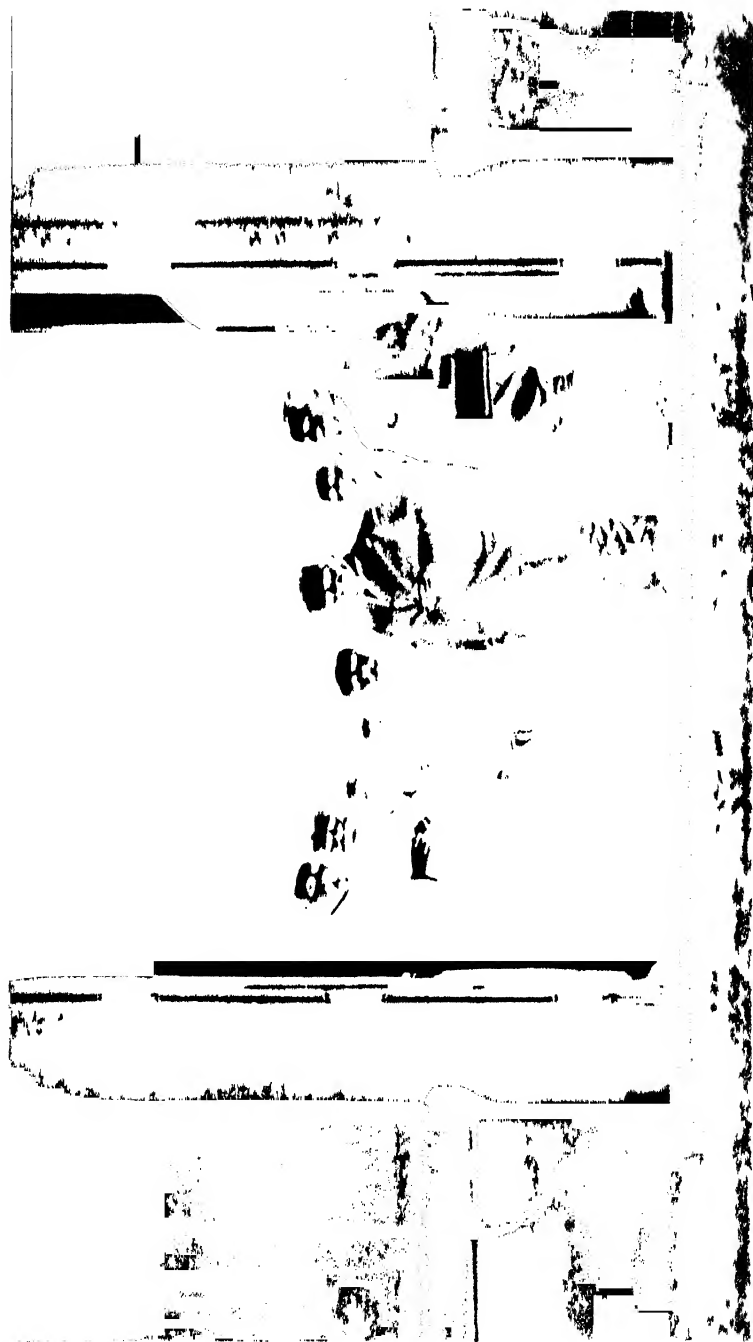
It will be your duty to transmit the decisions taken to the Commanders-in-Chief of our armies or to the heads of our military missions, with the mention "By order," indicating that you act in the name of the Government.

The transmission of these documents and of all communications emanating from the above-named authorities will be confided to an office organized for this purpose in the Code Section of the War Ministry, whose duty it will be to send them to each member of the War Committee.

Your liaison with the various armies will be maintained by means of the officers who are now charged with this service between these armies and the Government.

This document had nothing in common with the draft I had given the Minister. According to the terms used by Admiral Lacaze I was merely the technical adviser of the Government and its agent of execution, having no personal authority whatever. This strict subordination was clearly marked by the requirement that all papers signed by me must bear the indication "By order." My staff was reduced to a study section. In short, I was deprived of every prerogative that goes with command, and of all personal action upon the Commanders-in-Chief of the armies in France and in the Near East.

After much reflection I decided that it was my duty to put aside any question of personal pride and to do all I could to aid in the success of the new organization which the Government seemed determined to establish. However, there was an unimportant detail in the Government's project that I desired to have modified without delay: the narrow rule prescribed for my liaison with the Commanders-in-Chief on the various fronts. The officers who maintained this service between the Government and G.H.Q. would not suffice for the constant communication I



AT THE MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

From left to right: M. Bland, General Joffre, General de Castelnau, General George M. Allen, General Thomas





would need to establish if I was to be kept fully informed of the progress of operations on the different fronts.

However, before sending an answer to Admiral Lacaze's communication, I determined to wait until I could form an opinion of its underlying principles by actual observation of the way the Government intended to apply the new system. An occasion was soon furnished. At a meeting of the War Committee I brought up the question of liaison officers, and the Government agreed to give me satisfaction on that point. Then another opportunity arose, when a radio message from the Kaiser to his sister, Queen Sophie of Greece, was intercepted. This message proved conclusively the connivance of Greece with the Central Powers, and I seized the occasion to recommend that instructions covering the situation should be given to General Sarrail. I sent General Gamelin to Paris to submit my proposition to the Government, and he returned with the approval I desired.

The manner in which, on these two occasions, the Government had seemed to conceive my rôle, confirmed me in my desire to give the new organization a fair trial; therefore, on December 20th, in replying to the Minister's proposed draft, I contented myself with merely renewing the request, made verbally at the meeting of the day before, that three more officers be assigned to the Government's liaison service, which from now on was to keep me in contact with the different armies.<sup>18</sup>

Meantime, I was informed on December 19th, that the Government had approved my request to have my staff installed in the *Ecole Militaire* and that the Military Governor had been instructed to make the arrangements I desired.

Thus, on December 20th I had reason to believe that the projected organization would be put into effect. I was determined, on my part, to show a large spirit of conciliation, not wishing to cause any embarrassment to the Government, which I knew to be at grips with a most violent opposition in Parliament. I, therefore, renounced making complaints or demands, especially those contained in my letter of December 14th, confining myself, as just related, to a request touching a matter of detail and which could not be construed as raising any question of principle.

This was the situation when, on December 21st, a further meeting of the War Committee was held. A number of changes in command were there decided upon, amongst others, that of General Foch, who was

<sup>18</sup> Since the beginning of the war Colonel Pénelon and Major Herbillon had maintained the liaison between me and the Government.

relieved and "placed at the disposal of the Minister of War." I pointed out how profoundly regrettable it was from every point of view to deprive the country of the services of this great soldier, and that his recall from the front would be considered a disgrace which nothing whatever justified. I was fortunate enough to succeed in having him placed at General Nivelle's disposal for the purpose of preparing a plan of operations for our right wing, in case the Germans should violate the neutrality of Switzerland, as it was then anticipated they would do.

During this meeting I learned of a still more serious matter. The plan of operations of the French armies on the Western theatre for 1917 had been entirely changed by General Nivelle without my having been in any way consulted. As related in a previous chapter, the new plan comprised, amongst other changes, a considerable extension of the British front; consent to this could only be obtained by governmental action, and it seemed to me that this action lay peculiarly within my province as "technical adviser" of the Government. Moreover, the modification proposed was certain to entail a delay in the general offensive of the various Allied armies which I had had such difficulty in getting accepted and whose execution I seemed qualified to ensure. Here was a serious violation not, this time, of a detail, but of the very principle underlying my new functions.

The next day I received a letter from Admiral Lacaze, dated the previous day, December 21st, in which he informed me that, in accordance with the decisions of the Government, he forwarded me instructions concerning my new functions. Then followed an exact copy of the Draft sent me on December 18th, and quoted on page 548. The Minister's letter ending with a paragraph saying, "I am addressing a copy of these instructions to General Nivelle and at the same time informing him that his liaison with the Government and with the British and Belgian armies will be maintained directly and will function in the same manner as obtained when you were in command."

This letter not only refused to consider the very moderate observations I had made on receiving the proposed draft and which suggested no change other than an increase in the number of liaison officers, but it aggravated the situation by the added paragraph wherein it was prescribed that General Nivelle's liaison with the Government, on one hand, and with the British and Belgian armies, on the other, would be maintained directly and function in the same manner as when I myself was commanding the French armies in conformity with the decree of December 2, 1915. The clause clearly established complete autonomy in

the relations of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North-East with the Government and with the Allied armies.

In other words, insufficient liaison between the Commanders-in-Chief and myself, direct relations between the Commanders-in-Chief and the Government and between them and the Allied armies. Under these conditions it might well be asked what rôle I was supposed to play.

All these occurrences tended to convince me that the growing hostility which manifested itself in certain political quarters towards me was creating an atmosphere inimical to the exercise of the delicate functions I was expected to fulfil.

The next day, December 23rd, I received another letter from Admiral Lacaze, which confirmed this impression. Answering a question touching a matter of administration which I had brought up, the Minister of War *ad interim* wrote:

It will doubtless seem to you as it does to me absolutely essential that General Nivelle's situation should be clearly defined, so that no misunderstanding may arise.

The nomination of this general officer to the command of the Armies of the North and North-East places him solely under the orders of the Minister of War, with whom he corresponds directly.

Under these circumstances he enjoys the same powers, attributes, pay and allowances as you did when you exercised this command.

The same applies to the general commanding-in-chief the Army of the Near East.

In addition, a letter addressed to General Sarrail, of which a copy was furnished me, still further clarified the situation. It read:

All decisions and suggestions which, should occasion arise, may be communicated to you by General Joffre, technical adviser of the Government, will be signed with the indication "By order," showing that he acts in the name of the Government. The liaison between the Government and the Army of the Near East will be assured by two officers, who will alternatively replace each other at the headquarters of that army.

With the passage of the years, this question of liaison may seem perhaps not to have as much importance as I attached to it. Nevertheless, it was fundamental. During the whole time that I commanded the French armies I only brought my action into play after being accurately informed by my officers.

I have already said, as I never weary of repeating, that since the man who directs operations cannot see everything for himself, he is obliged

to see through the eyes of collaborators in whom he has confidence. To take away from me the possibility of informing myself was to deprive me of the means of exercising command.

Upon receiving these communications from the Minister of War, I wrote out two letters of resignation, one addressed to him, the other to the Prime Minister. Knowing that the meeting of the Senate in secret session would end that day, I decided to send them to Paris the same evening. They had already been prepared when Colonel Pénelon arrived and informed me of what was going on in Paris.

General Lyautey had reached the city during the morning. He had sent for General Nivelle and had accepted the duties of Minister of War only on certain conditions. He had asked that his attributions should be clearly defined and a meeting of the Cabinet had been called for that purpose. It was to take place at 9 o'clock that evening, after the close of the secret session of the Senate. I was also informed that during the afternoon M. Briand had requested that I should come to see him at 9.30 a.m. on the 25th.

None of this news was of a nature to modify my decision, which was now definite. I said so to Colonel Pénelon, who insisted that at least I should postpone its execution. He represented to me that it might have been due to Admiral Lacaze that events had followed the turn they had taken; that General Lyautey would probably not hold the same point of view, and that in any case I ought to wait and see what decisions would be taken by the Cabinet regarding the attributions of the new Minister of War. After thinking all this over, I decided to await the results of the interviews I was to have the next day with the Prime Minister, and I countermanded the departure of my staff for Neuilly, which had been fixed for the following morning.

On the 24th, the newspapers reported the results of the Cabinet meeting, held with General Lyautey present. "It was decided," read the communiqué to the press, "that the Minister of War will be charged with examining and reporting upon all questions having to do with carrying on the war, and all preparations connected therewith; it will be his duty to inform heads of departments concerned and the Commanders-in-Chief, of all decisions taken, and ensure the co-ordination required for their proper execution." This wording was sufficiently clear to show that, contrary to what Colonel Pénelon had said, the arrival of General Lyautey had in no way altered the situation.

I, therefore, left for Paris with the purpose of getting the counsel of

one of my personal friends, well posted in regard to what was going on in governmental and political circles, M. Maurice Sarraut. He advised me clearly and firmly to place before the Government my conditions; if they were not agreed to, he considered, as I did, that rather than accept any belittling of my situation, I should resign.

On returning to Chantilly I learned that General Lyautey had telephoned me that, having assumed the post of Minister of War the evening before, he would have come to see me that very day, but he had been kept in Paris, and was obliged to postpone his visit until 3.30 the next afternoon. I sent a reply to say that as I was obliged to go to Paris on the 25th to see M. Briand, it was unnecessary for the Minister of War to give himself this trouble, and that I would come to see him at the hour he had fixed for his visit to Chantilly.

At 9.30 a.m. I arrived at the Ministry of Justice, where M. Briand lived. He was ill from the overwork of the preceding days, and he excused himself for receiving me in bed. I explained the object of my visit. It seemed to me highly important that the throes of the crisis in which the High Command had been struggling for nearly a month should be brought to an end. If the definition of my attributions was delaying this result, if the solution adopted was so to diminish my authority as to make of me nothing but a useless agent of communication, if the definition of my functions was to remain as set forth in the letter of December 22nd from the Minister of War *ad interim*, I had decided immediately to offer my resignation to the Government.

M. Briand answered that he believed, as I did, that it was essential to put an end with all speed to a situation which was necessarily injurious to the interests of both France and her Allies; but he asked me not to execute the intention I had expressed, because of the effect which my departure would produce upon public opinion in France, amongst our Allies and in enemy countries. He ended by declaring that the Government had the fullest confidence in me. In saying this he was certainly sincere, but I had grown to understand the political situation too well not to realize that M. Briand was no longer free to make his public acts conform to his private sentiments. Therefore, in taking my leave, I formally reiterated my intention of resigning. The Prime Minister then asked me to return the next day, expressing his regret that he was unable to ask me to take luncheon with him.

I saw General Lyautey during the afternoon. Immediately, and without suggestion on my part, he said that he considered it impossible for

the conduct and co-ordination of operations to become a function of the Government. Any such solution must be put aside, for history was full of notorious as well as convincing examples of the failure attending it. In his opinion I was still the only person indicated for exercising these functions of co-ordination; he even was good enough to add that the Allies had effected a union around my person by a spontaneous acceptance of my direction, and that my removal from these important functions would compromise that unity of action which, through me, had been secured. Nevertheless, he did not seek to conceal from me the serious difficulties created by the state of mind existing in political and governmental circles. In conclusion, General Lyautey asserted that he in no way approved the letter of December 21st, which had so strangely defined my attributions.

For my part, I told Lyautey how urgent it was that the direction of operations be seized by some firm hand, for it had been adrift ever since the crisis started, to the joy and profit of the Germans, for whom nothing could be more advantageous than the respite so unexpectedly granted them by the intrusion of politics in our military affairs. He fully agreed, and proceeded to assure me that he would devote himself to this question most energetically. During the whole conversation the new Minister of War manifested towards me the greatest deference, and, when I took leave of him, insisted upon accompanying me to my car.

On returning to Chantilly I sought to discover—more for reasons of conscience than through any conviction—whether by closely studying the spirit underlying the decree of December 2, 1915, some way could not be found to give my attributions sufficient breadth and endow them with sufficient authority to enable me to play a useful rôle, and place at my country's service that personal influence which the Minister of War had just spontaneously declared was so beneficent. After much groping about, I arrived at a draft which I intended to submit the next day to the Prime Minister. It read as follows:

December 25, 1916.

*Draft*

The Attributions attaching to the office of general Commanding-in-Chief the French Armies.

I. The general Commanding-in-Chief the French Armies will take part in the meetings of the War Committee as Technical Adviser to the Government in respect of the direction of the war.

He will ensure the execution of the Committee's decisions in matters relating to military operations.

II. In consequence, he will exercise the direction of these operations in the various theatres and, in the name of the Government, will give Commanders-in-Chief concerned the instructions necessary to effect this purpose.<sup>14</sup> All questions dealing with operations will be submitted to him by Commanders-in-Chief for presentation by him to the War Committee.

III. He is charged with co-ordinating the operations of the French armies with those of the Allied armies, in conformity with the decisions of the War Committee.

To this end he will establish the necessary relations with the Commanders-in-Chief of the Allied armies.

IV. Recommendations concerning officers being considered for command of armies or groups of armies will be submitted to him by Commanders-in-Chief on the various theatres. He will forward these with his personal observations to the War Committee.

At 2.30 p.m. on December 26th I arrived for my appointment with M. Briand. At the very opening of the conversation I saw clearly that he was eluding all the questions I asked, the very ones about which, the day before, he had seemed so positive. Then, apparently with a view to cutting short a conversation which undoubtedly embarrassed him, in spite of all his cleverness, he announced that the decree raising me to the dignity of Marshal would be signed that same evening by the President. I expressed my thanks. Then, instead of presenting the draft of the project prescribing my duties, I handed him the letter of resignation which I had written that morning before leaving Chantilly.

The letter was addressed to the Minister of War. It was preceded by another to the Prime Minister, announcing my desire to be relieved of my functions. The text was as follows:

Headquarters of the Army,  
December 26, 1916.

The Commander-in-Chief

To the President of the Council of Ministers.

I have the honour to hand you herewith a letter in which I request the Minister of War to relieve me of my functions.

It is urgent that a decision be taken without delay, for the direction of the war has not been completely assured for several days, a part of the documents relating to this service having been sent directly to the Minister of War by the commander of the Armies of the North-East.

J. JOFFRE.

<sup>14</sup> Except in theatres of operations subject to the authority of the Minister of the Colonies, or of the general Commanding-in-Chief in North Africa or of the Resident General of the French Government in Morocco.



Headquarters of the Army,  
December 26, 1916.

The Commander-in-Chief  
To the Minister of War.

At the time I was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies and technical adviser to the War Committee, I considered that I would have a twofold rôle to fulfil, one towards the Government, in whose hands lay the supreme direction of the war, and one towards our armies, whose own operations, as also those in combination with our Allies' armies, I would be expected to co-ordinate.

In a memorandum which I presented to the War Committee, I set down the conditions under which I believed it possible to execute this double mission.

I did not consider it proper to raise objections to the proposed draft prescribing my duties, which you sent me by way of reply, as I realized the difficulties which faced the Government, and I did not wish to increase them at such a difficult moment; I, moreover, thought that in practice the duties assigned me could be brought into harmony with the necessities I had foreseen.

You did not see your way to accept the few minor modifications which I requested to have inserted in your draft, and its definite wording, as recently sent me, aggravates the original text. Under these conditions I deem it impossible to assume the responsibilities which would fall to me, as I would have no means of doing so.

I, therefore, request that you be kind enough to relieve me of the functions confided to me by the decree of December 13, 1916, extending the terms of the decree of December 2, 1915.

J. JOFFRE.

After reading these two letters, the Prime Minister handed them back to me, merely saying, "You are right." In this brief exclamation there was a note of something like relief. As a matter of fact, M. Briand would have been glad to keep me. He knew, as did General Lyautey, that it would be a long time before Nivelle could acquire the authority I enjoyed not only in our own armies but in those of our Allies, and he doubtless felt that my resignation was a rather pitiable ending to a political agitation which he had been incapable of dominating.

He informed me that General Nivelle would occupy the same situation with regard to the Armies of the North-East as I had filled during the first two and a half years of the war, and that the Army of the Near East would be directly under the authority of the Minister of War. Unity of command was thus once more destroyed.

On leaving M. Briand, I proceeded to the Elysée. General Lyautey was with the President when I was shown in. M. Poincaré first of all con-

firmed the news of my nomination to be Marshal of France, adding that he felt a pride in being called upon to re-establish this dignity, the last recipient of which dated from before the war of 1870.

After thanking the President, I told him of my decision to resign, and handed him the letter I had just shown to M. Briand. After reading it, he said, "Yes, there is no doubt about it, they have gone too far—in any case much farther than I myself would have desired." Then, with a touch of anxiety he inquired: "Are you going to publish this letter?"

"You ought to know me well enough, Mr. President," I answered, "to understand that I would never permit myself to create difficulties for the Government at such a moment."

On hearing these words M. Poincaré's face lit up with a smile of satisfaction which was rare enough with him and which he made no effort to conceal. He had been seized with fear lest the public should learn the reasons of my resignation.

On December 27th, the newspapers published the following note:

Desiring fittingly to recognize the eminent services rendered the country by General Joffre, the Government has decided to raise him to the dignity of Marshal of France. A decree to this effect will be submitted with the least possible delay for ratification by Parliament.

Foreign Military Missions will continue to be attached to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-East, who will maintain his liaison with the Commanders-in-Chief on Allied fronts under the conditions now obtaining.

The Army of the Near East is placed directly under the Minister of War; the services at G.H.Q. which were formerly charged with matters relating to this army are hereby transferred to the Staff of the War Ministry.

The decrees of December 2, 1915, and December 13, 1916, are modified accordingly.

The report of the Minister of War to the President and the decree raising me to the dignity of Marshal of France were also published. The first read as follows:

Mr. President:

Existing legislation provides that the dignity of Marshal of France may be conferred at the pleasure of the Government. A long period of peace has suspended the operation of this law, a most fitting occasion now presents itself for reviving it in favour of the general who, on the Marne and on the Yser, has twice arrested the victorious onslaught of the enemy's armies at the very moment when they considered their end was attained and our subjection on the point of being accomplished.

The entire country awaits this act of gratitude and justice on the part of

the Government. If, therefore, you share my views, I request that you be good enough to affix your signature to the accompanying decree.

Please receive, M. le Président, etc., etc.

LYAUTEY,

Minister of War.

The decree, after citing the various laws covering the case, declared (Article D): that "Major-General Joffre (Joseph-Jacques-Césaire) is created Marshal of France, and (Article II) the Minister of War is charged with the execution of this decree." It was signed by M. Poincaré, President of the Republic, and General Lyautey, Minister of War, and dated December 26, 1916.

On the morning of the 28th, after receiving all the officers of G.H.Q., I left Chantilly and took up my quarters in Paris.

I have given much space to the details of this political crisis, which filled most of the month of December, 1916; it terminated in my resignation and brought about profound changes in the command of the French armies.

It is not easy, as may be imagined, for me to speak of the consequences which my departure brought about, for while I promised myself that throughout these pages I would say exactly what I thought, I have as little intention of wreathing garlands for my own brow as of discussing the various judgments which have been expressed concerning me. Nevertheless, future generations will desire to find in my Memoirs something more than the mere satisfaction of legitimate curiosity, and I would like them to draw some profitable lessons from the events I have just related.

The organization of the French High Command at the close of 1916 was far from perfect, and I have already said that I thought it could be improved. The existence of two immense and widely separated fronts on which the French armies were operating rendered my task extremely heavy; it was, therefore, quite logical to simplify and lighten it by relieving the Commander-in-Chief of the French armies of the duty of directing in person the operations on the French Western front. But it was no less evident that the unity of command brought about with such difficulty in December, 1915, should have been vigorously respected, and that the general direction of operations was the province of the Commander-in-Chief and not an affair of the Government.

Now, at the end of December, 1916, this unity of command was abolished, and this constituted, to my mind, a double misfortune. In the first place, because the general direction now fell into the hands of constantly changing and often incapable Ministers, or of irresponsible

bureaux, which was little better; in the second place, because, having abolished unity of command in our own armies we were hardly in a position to urge that our Allies should consent to the establishment of one supreme direction for all. The crisis of December, 1916, contributed, therefore, to delay the adoption of the united command which, in fact, if not in name, I had brought about in December, 1915, and which was only restored—though after what perilous adventures!—in the spring of 1918.

But this was not all. The change made in the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies of the North-East would have had only the smallest influence upon the execution of the plan of campaign for 1917, whose approval I had obtained from the Allies in November, 1916, if I had been left the supreme direction of operations; for I would have devoted every effort to having this plan executed without the least delay. Once I had left, General Nivelle so completely altered the plans that new adjustments had to be made and new agreements effected with our Allies.

I am far from criticizing General Nivelle. I believe he acted within his rights and even according to his duty. He was responsible to the Government, and he had, in consequence, to apply the plan which he thought best. And, indeed, it would not have been understood if the change in Commanders-in-Chief had not brought about a change in formulae; and this all the more so, since the President of the Republic, fearing nothing so much as to see the battle of the Somme start up again, had become the ardent protagonist of new methods.

The result was to bring about an inevitable delay in the Allied attacks fixed for the spring of 1917. Instead of starting operations in February, the Franco-British offensive began only in April, and the retreat which Hindenburg was thus given the time to make at his leisure, resulted in our offensive merely beating the air. I repeat what I have already said, that if we had had the firmness to renew and amplify the battle which the winter had interrupted, the Germans would have been crushed. They themselves recognized it by making a retreat which constitutes an avowal more convincing than any words, and the unavailing attempts to make peace which they put forth in December, 1916, are added proof that they were fully conscious of the disaster facing them. The men who saved them have a heavy responsibility to bear in the face of History.

A radical alteration in the system of command is always delicate and even critical in the midst of war. That effected in December, 1916, took place at a most unfortunate moment. I think that what I have related

in the preceding pages demonstrates that neither the President nor the Prime Minister had desired to see the change pushed to the point it finally reached. If the matter be examined closely, it will be seen that the origin of the crisis lay in the ever-increasing weakness of the Government in the face of the two Chambers. Under guise of verification and supervision, Parliament little by little invaded the province of the Government. In 1914 the imminent danger threatening us, in 1915 the unshakable resolution of M. Millerand had blocked the progress of these growing pretensions. M. Millerand departed; then, after Gallieni's short term in office, General Roques arrived, and his weakness—which he mistook for cleverness—brought about a confusion of powers whose climax was reached when the sessions in Secret Committee began in December, 1916.

At that moment, M. Briand believed that he would find some way to control the flood, but his hopes were deceived. And it was logical that they should be; for there are currents against which no headway can be made without firmness, and M. Briand possessed only pliability and adroitness. The changes he effected in his Cabinet and the promises he made of important modifications in the High Command, were looked upon by Parliament as only partial victories. Although too intelligent not to see how important it was to resist, the Prime Minister was too much of an opportunist effectually to do so, once he had begun by yielding. His subtle manœuvres finally brought him to the impasse from which I rescued him—to his profound relief—by my resignation.

The President, who presided over this lamentable discussion, was no less intelligent than M. Briand and his long experience of public affairs gave him an immense quickness in seizing the essentials of any question. But he was uneasy over the state of public opinion and disturbed by the strong opposition he saw developing in Parliament. Moreover, the criticism being directed against him by his political enemies visibly affected him; it seemed to me a pity that the consciousness of duty performed with such passionate ardour could not bring to this honest man and splendid patriot the strength to disdain these attacks.

An illustration of the condition of mind exhibited by M. Poincaré at this time may not be out of place. I have already explained that many Members of Parliament were in the habit of referring indignantly to "the life they lead at Chantilly." My departure seemed to offer a good opportunity for stopping this so-called scandal and, therefore, one of the first suggestions which the President made to General Nivelle was the urgent need of removing G.H.Q. from Chantilly. That town was perfectly

adapted to the purposes of a large headquarters: it was small enough to make it easy to keep watch over foreigners or other suspicious persons, but large enough to house all the services, bureaux and personnel; its situation made communication easy with British G.H.Q. and with the Northern and Centre groups of our armies, where most of the activity was centred; it lent itself to ready communication with Paris. All of this counted for nothing. G.H.Q. must be transferred to Beauvais, which was farther from the front and more distant from headquarters of the various armies. To establish at Beauvais the enormous telephonic and telegraphic system which had been gradually installed at Chantilly alone cost over 500,000 francs, without mentioning the confusion entailed in the communications of G.H.Q. during the transfer. And all this because an ill-informed public had decreed that Chantilly was a second Sodom!

It was the same fear of public opinion that caused M. Poincaré so greatly to dread my letter of resignation being given to the press.

Another indication of the President's condition of mind was furnished by the manner he chose for investing me with the dignity of Marshal of France. He handed me my bâton in his office, the sole witness being the Minister of War. I think nothing need be added by way of comment, and if I mention the fact it is not to make complaint, for I have never been accused of a too great love of show; but I venture the belief that never was a Marshal's bâton presented in more modest and discreet surroundings.

General Lyautey, who took over the office of Minister of War four days before my departure, also assumed an unexpected attitude in the crisis.<sup>15</sup> Everybody knows General Lyautey and the services he has rendered France, especially his work in Morocco. It should never be forgotten that at the outbreak of the war, when he was directed to withdraw to the ports on the coast, abandoning the interior of the country pending the advent of better days, he managed, by his personal prestige and the intelligent measures he took, not only to avoid this retirement—which would have been fatal—but found means to send more troops to the theatre of war than had ever been expected of him. Such acts mark a great leader, with wide vision and little fear of responsibility.

When M. Briand was seeking to solve the ministerial crisis which he himself had initiated on December 9th, he called upon Lyautey to replace Roques. Although far away from the Capital, Lyautey was too well-informed as to what was going on not to appreciate the difficulties with

<sup>15</sup> He arrived in Paris on December 22nd. I resigned on December 26th.

which he would have to contend. He departed with little enthusiasm, imposing as a condition that General Gouraud should give him back his place in Morocco, if he should decide to resign his portfolio, thus proving that he had only slight confidence in the duration of his term as Minister. And yet, in spite of this fact, his first thought on arriving in Paris was to demand for himself the supreme direction of operations, believing that there was no room for any intermediate organ between himself and the Commanders-in-Chief of the Armies of the North-East and of the Near East. This showed a fine confidence in his own capacity and proved that he shrank from no responsibility.

However, when on March 14, 1917, exasperated by the daily struggle with the politicians, he resigned his office, what remained of the solution to whose adoption he had contributed? Upon whom was the portfolio of War to devolve? For how long a time? Into whose hands was now to be confided the supreme conduct of operations?

Had General Lyautey conceived the situation with clearer vision, if—to speak plainly—he had only remembered that “Ministers may come and Ministers may go, but the war goes on forever,” he would not have contributed his share to wresting from my hands that unified direction of the war which I had with such difficulty managed to bring about.

*MY MISSION TO AMERICA*

THE days which followed my return to Paris, toward the end of the year 1916, were the saddest of my life. After the heavy responsibilities which, during two and a half years of war, had fallen to my lot, I might almost have thought myself entitled to a rest; but how could I expect to find any peace of mind when, measuring at a glance the road already travelled, I tried to look into the future and discover what it held in store for my country.

Although I have spoken at length in the preceding pages of the plans whose realization was interrupted by my departure from Chantilly, it seems to me essential to return once more to the subject, in order to indicate clearly my state of mind during the first weeks of 1917.

In spite of the fact that I was rigorously excluded from all that was going on, I was acquainted with the broad lines of General Nivelle's plan. Moreover, the newspapers did not fail to emphasize the contrast between the "Verdun method," which my successor proposed to apply, and the "Somme method," which events seemed to have condemned.

It was evident that the change effected in the Commander-in-Chief was going to result in a change in the plan of operations. Neither the Army nor public opinion, which had been induced to believe that the Somme had been a failure, could imagine that General Nivelle would be satisfied to put his signature to plans which I had drawn up. But a feeling of positive despair arose when one examined the project which was to serve as a basis for the coming Allied offensive on the Western front.

To begin with, since General Nivelle intended to make his decisive effort in a region which had not been organized with a view to a great attack, it was evident that the operation could only begin after some delay; first, because the agreements I had obtained from our Allies were about to be re-opened for discussion, and likewise because, as I have just remarked, the preparation of an offensive in a new theatre



demanding an equipment of the front in question which could not be effected in a single day.

Now, when you hold your enemy in a close embrace, as we held the Germans on the Somme,—where they lived under the perpetual menace of an attack which might entail their destruction,—if you give him the time in which to recover himself, re-establish his positions and re-organize his forces, you commit an error whose consequences may be incalculable.

Again, what, after all, was this "Verdun method" which it was desired to have applied on a large scale to the operations of 1917? At Verdun, during October and again during December of the preceding year, in the course of two attacks (with which I had something to do, it may be said in passing) we had retaken from the enemy the ground which, at the price of bloody sacrifices, he had torn from us morsel by morsel. But these attacks, to a great extent, had succeeded because, on the ground where they took place, the enemy's defensive organizations had virtually disappeared, as a result of the almost incessant bombardment which had pulverized this area during nine months of struggle. The fighting went on from shell hole to shell hole; there was no barbed wire, except that hastily laid; bomb-proofs were few and precarious; the trenches caved-in and full of mud; indeed, the woods and villages which form the points of support, the centres of resistance, of a battlefield, had so entirely disappeared, that even today one will search the soil in vain for their traces.

On the Chemin des Dames, to which front General Nivelle was about to transfer the battle, the enemy organizations were strong and in excellent condition, the villages were standing in part, the cellars and dug-outs intact. How could anyone hope to destroy these organizations during the artillery preparation, cross them in a single bound and in one day carry the fight into open country?

If the overwhelming and decisive attack which General Nivelle dreamed about had been delivered on the Somme, I would have had serious hopes of seeing it succeed, for the conditions would have been similar to those we met at Verdun; that is to say, we would have been confronted with a system of fortifications disorganized, incomplete, and, in places, even wholly destroyed.

The comparison has often been made, and with reason, between the trench warfare which circumstances had imposed upon us and the siege of a fortress. On the Somme we had succeeded in making a breach in the enemy's wall wide enough to contemplate launching our assaulting columns through it. In attacking the Chemin des Dames, we were



GENERAL JOFFRE WITH KING GEORGE

On the left is the Prince of Wales.



butting our heads against a part of this wall that was wholly intact. This was creating needless difficulties for ourselves and preparing a terrible disappointment for the country.

It may be argued that it is easy enough, at this late day, to criticize events which turned out badly; but to this it may be answered that my reasoning loses none of its force through this fact, and also that I am not the only one who has advanced it. It is not necessary to have closely followed the innumerable and sterile discussions in which General Nivelle was obliged to engage with various members of the Government (for it is public property today) to know that the officers who were called upon to execute the attack, men such as General Pétain and General Micheler, who both commanded groups of armies and whose experience in war no one can deny, manifested, as the days went by, their anxiety and their lack of confidence in the plans they would soon be called upon to execute.

To the gnawing anxiety which, for the reasons I have just related, held me in its grip, was now added another, no less cruel. Russia, our faithful and loyal Ally of the early years of the war, was now disintegrating in the mire of disorder and revolution. There were, of course, many who deceived themselves regarding the consequences which might follow upon this change of régime; they believed that it would galvanize the Russian people, tend to put men in their right places, inspire a new efficiency and give the country's energies a chance freely to develop themselves. For me, the revolution which was in progress marked only the first step in the descent of this great nation towards the bottom of an abyss from which, I feared, it would be a long time in emerging. It is not in the course of a single day that a hundred millions of ignorant men can be educated and taught the proper use of liberty—the very name of which was new to them.

There is no gainsaying that our Russian Allies had been guilty of mistakes, and for these they were now about to pay. In the military domain, the first and greatest error, and the only one I need mention here, was the removal of the Grand Duke Nicholas from command. Had he remained at the head of the Russian Army, I am convinced that the dishonest intrigues which brought about the Roumanian catastrophe in 1916 could not have developed, and the victories won by Broussiloff would have been followed by fruitful and glorious results.

There was now no denying that, if, as seemed most probable, Russia continued for any length of time to sink deeper and deeper into the mire of anarchy, a whole section of the wall confining the Central Powers

would be broken down. The Germans and Austrians, their hands freed on the east, could now turn, the former against us, the latter against the Italians. This consideration made me regret even more bitterly than ever that it had been impossible for the Franco-British offensive, concerning which Sir Douglas Haig and I were in full agreement, to commence as early as February, 1917—that is to say, at a time when the Germans were still obliged to take the Russian Army into full account.

However, a ray of hope was now beginning to pierce the gloom which enveloped us—the relations of Germany with the United States had grown very tense and, according to information gathered from the press or brought me by a few American friends who came to see me, a rupture between the two countries was imminent.

While such an event was desirable from every point of view, the question naturally arose as to what would be the nature and the importance of the aid which the great American Republic would be in a position to bring us: her moral support, assuredly; her financial support, most probably; but her military support—how great would that be and under what form would it be offered?

Such was my condition of mind when, on April 1st, a message arrived from the Prime Minister requesting me to come to his office. I immediately complied. On arriving, M. Ribot, without further preamble, informed me that the Government intended to send a mission to the United States, which would leave shortly. At its head would be M. Viviani, formerly Prime Minister and at present Lord Chancellor. M. Ribot asked me to accompany M. Viviani and aid him to carry out this important task in the way most conducive to our interests. He added to his suggestion some very flattering words for me, pointing out that my name was known throughout America, that the Victory of the Marne was still present in everybody's memory and that no one could represent the French Army to the American people as well as I.

My first impulse was to refuse. I felt an instinctive repugnance at leaving my country and my family during a time of such distress. Then I reflected that I was of absolutely no use at present, and that, since the opportunity offered, I had no right to refuse to render a service to my people.

M. Ribot likewise informed me that a British mission, with Lord Balfour at its head, was about to sail. It would, on its part, represent the interests of Great Britain to the American Government. It then occurred to me that if our new Allies saw only political men arriving amongst them, they might not get a complete and accurate idea concerning the

military situation. I, therefore, answered M. Ribot that I was at the Government's orders and that I was ready to start at any moment.

Without waiting for the instructions which undoubtedly would be furnished me as to the exact object of the mission I was to fulfil, I busied myself in getting together a staff to aid me in this new task. I decided to ask for Lieutenant-Colonel Fabry as my chief of Cabinet, and, in addition, Assistant-Surgeon Lucien Dreyfus, who had taken care of me ever since the beginning of the war and whose discretion and unremitting devotion I had learned to value very highly. The Minister of War placed at my disposal Lieutenant-Colonel Remond, Major Requin and Lieutenant de Tesson.

The Navy was represented by Vice-Admiral Chocheprat, who brought with him two officers. A number of officials accompanied M. Viviani; among them was the Marquis de Chambrun, a descendant of Lafayette, who represented the Department of Lozère in the Chamber of Deputies.

It was only on April 13th, the day but one preceding my departure from Paris, that M. Painlevé, the Minister of War, handed me a letter specifying my mission. "The Government," it read, "has considered it necessary under the existing circumstances to send to America one of its most prominent military personalities, in order that a general outline of the policy which will govern the co-operation of the American forces with the Allied Armies may be established as soon as possible."

This extremely vague formula had at least one merit—it showed me that our Government, being in entire ignorance of the conditions under which America might be able and willing to work with us, gave me *carte blanches* to organize this collaboration with the Washington authorities.

I do not think that M. Viviani, on his part, received instructions that were any more definite than mine; at least he never mentioned them to me.

On the morning of April 15th, we took the train for Brest, and in the evening we sailed on the cruiser *Lorraine II*. Two American journalists had been authorized to accompany us, Mr. Elmer Roberts of the *Associated Press* and Mr. Lincoln Eyre, of the *New York World*.

During the days preceding my departure I had spent much time reflecting upon the problem which had been placed before me, and as soon as we were installed aboard the *Lorraine* I went to work with my officers. I naturally consecrated myself to the military part of the co-operation that we were going to ask of the Americans, and this amply sufficed to occupy our enforced leisure during the crossing.

The first thing I noticed in examining the matter closely was the smallness of the American Army in comparison with the size of the population, a condition arising in part from the country's good fortune in having no powerful neighbours. Therefore, my first idea was naturally to ask the Americans to furnish us with men instead of armies; these would arrive in France organized into small units, such as companies and battalions, which could then be incorporated into French regiments for training and service at the front.

This plan had the advantage of lending itself to easy and, above all, rapid execution. All that would have to be done was to get men to enlist, equip the volunteers thus secured, embark them on ships, transport them to France, put them through a course of training in the interior and then send them to the front, where they would swell the strength of our units. By proceeding in this manner, the difficult problem of obtaining officers for the higher grades of the American Army would find itself quite naturally solved, since there would be no occasion for training general officers and staffs for the larger units, only captains and majors being needed.

I am much inclined to think that, at the moment I sailed, this was the opinion which prevailed in French governmental spheres and at our General Headquarters.

Upon reflection, the idea could not be defended for a single minute. No great nation having a proper consciousness of its own dignity—and America perhaps less than any other—would allow its citizens to be incorporated like poor relations in the ranks of some other army and fight under a foreign flag. Therefore, the question had to be fairly and squarely attacked, though without deluding ourselves as to the difficulties that would be met and must be overcome.

I have known America for a long time. I love and admire her. I understand the practical spirit which characterizes the nation. I know that in talking to Americans the acme of cleverness consists in speaking frankly, with no roundabout phrases—saying always exactly what you think. My decision was, therefore, quickly taken. I resolved to base my line of conduct upon the following ideas:

Prove to the Americans that, having entered the war during a critical phase, which, sooner or later, was likely to be decisive, they would be called upon to play a rôle commensurate with their strength. If they were to do this successfully, they must create an army from the ground up, our experience being at their disposal for laying down the outlines of its organization. They must transport the units of this army to France

as soon as they were ready, and continue there the training of officers and men, using French officers to assist them. Then, as soon as possible, they must have assigned to this army, which would be under the command of an American general, a part of the front which would grow in extent as the American forces sent to France increased in number.

With this idea as a basis, I had my officers draw up a series of memoranda which it was my intention to present to the American authorities and which would serve me as notes during the conversations I expected to have with them.

As we continued our voyage westward, the wireless brought the first news concerning the offensive which General Nivelle had finally started on the French front. I had the immediate impression that the affair was a failure, or, in any event, that it was far from bringing the grandiose results which had been expected.

The realization of this depressing fact confirmed me in the idea that a gigantic effort would have to be demanded of the Americans; it was no longer a question of their merely sending a few men to Europe for the purpose of promenading the Stars and Stripes along our front—supposing that they had ever intended to confine their intervention to any such limits; what must be done, and without a moment's delay, was to mobilize in the service of the Allied cause all of America's resources in men, material and money.

On the evening of April 24th we reached Hampton Roads. Here we were met by the North Atlantic Squadron of the American Navy, which rendered us the prescribed honours. Its commander, Admiral Henry T. Mayo, came on board the *Lorraine*, bringing with him his staff officers; Lieutenant-Colonel Spencer Cosby also arrived; he was formerly Military Attaché in France and was assigned to me during my stay in America.

The Admiral greeted me in a few simple and hearty words, declaring that he considered it the greatest honour of his career to have been sent to meet me on my arrival in his country. M. Jusserand, our distinguished and agreeable Ambassador in Washington, then arrived. With him were Mr. Long, Assistant Secretary of State, Mr. Franklin Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy,—bearing a name doubly dear to every French heart,—and General Hugh Scott, Chief of the General Staff, with whom, during all my visit, I maintained close and cordial relations.

As is customary, we immediately went on board the *Pennsylvania* to return Admiral Mayo's visit.

I have always preserved the happiest recollection of this first official



contact with America, and it will be seen that the impression grew more favourable every day. From the very moment of our arrival, the deference and courtesy which were shown us, on the one hand, and, on the other, the impression of order, power and majesty produced by the warships which lay beside us gave me the feeling that America had espoused our cause with all her heart and that she was preparing to enter the struggle with manly resolution.

That evening, we left the *Lorraine* and went on board the *Mayflower*, the President's yacht, kindly placed at our disposal for the trip to Washington. On the morning of the 25th, going up the Potomac, we passed Mount Vernon. The band played "The Star-Spangled Banner," while we stood at the salute, our eyes fixed on the house and tomb of Washington, which I had already decided I would visit during my stay.

We reached the Capital at noon. Mr. Lansing, the Secretary of State, came on board and gave us a most hearty welcome, while on shore there awaited us deputations from the Government Departments, Diplomats of the Allied nations, Mr. Balfour and the British Mission. The warm reception we got from these officials was followed by an enthusiastic greeting from the crowd—for me, a most comforting surprise. All the Departments, the offices, the shops, the factories and the schools had been closed; the whole population of the town was there to meet us. At the moment we touched American soil for the first time, a great roar of applause went up for the French Army and its representatives.

The 26th was devoted to official visits. We first went to call on Mr. Lansing, who afterwards accompanied us to the White House and presented us to Mr. Wilson. Our first interview with the President was conducted with much solemnity. After this, we proceeded to call on Mr. Baker, the Secretary of War.

The latter, accompanied by General Scott, came the same afternoon to return my visit, and I took advantage of this occasion to enter immediately upon the matter which had brought me to America. I wished to present my ideas to him with the least possible delay.

I first told him of my conviction that the United States were quite capable of organizing a great army and that I was certain they would succeed in the huge undertaking it involved. I then told him that I wanted him to realize that I had come to America, not to give advice, but to offer the fruits of an experience acquired during three years of terrible war; this experience I placed at his service as one friend anxious to save another from the errors which France as well as all the other belligerent nations had committed. I then let him understand how

ardently I desired to see the American Army come over to fight at our side, and that as quickly as possible; successive movements could be organized as bodies of troops were made ready and means of transport became available.

At the conclusion of this interview I handed Mr. Baker a copy of the programme I had drawn up during the voyage and which embodied the ideas I had just laid before him.

This first conversation with the Secretary of War left me with the impression that I was dealing with a man of acute intelligence, young, resolute, decided; and that his chief of staff was experienced and energetic. I felt that not only had they both understood the essential points of my programme, but that they had approved it and were going to put it into effect.

The task I was proposing to them was enormous, but wholly worthy of the might and resources of the nation they represented. But neither of them was the sort of man to let himself be stopped by any of the obstacles which stood in his way.

On the evening of this busy day we dined at the White House, and during the meal I had an opportunity of talking with the President (through an interpreter). He asked me many questions concerning the operations I had directed; the battle of Verdun had deeply impressed him, and he gave free expression to his admiration for the heroism which had carried our soldiers successfully through this long ordeal.

On the 27th I went to the War College, where I met General Kuhn, its eminent president. In his office I made a brief exposé of the military situation for him, Mr. Baker, General Scott and General Bliss; in the course of it I endeavoured to indicate the rôle America would be called upon to play in this critical phase of the war. That evening we dined at the French Embassy, where it was pleasant to note the prestige and authority which M. Jusserand enjoyed among our American friends.

On the 28th I had another conference at the War College, during the course of which I took occasion to enter more fully into the details of my programme and to clear up questions I had not yet touched upon.

But this date stands out in my memory as being a particularly happy one for our affairs. A supper had been offered us at the Alibi Club. As we were leaving the table, Mr. Nicholas Longworth came in to announce that both the House of Representatives and the Senate had passed the Draft Law by an enormous majority. Faced by an imperious necessity, America, following the example set by the United Kingdom a short time before, had decided that the weight of the war must be borne by all

citizens alike, and not merely fall on the shoulders of those who volunteered. The consequences of this measure, adopted with such amazing rapidity, was destined to have a decisive influence upon the issue of the war.

On April 29th, after receiving in the morning a large body of journalists who came to place at our disposal the powerful voice of the American press, I joined Mr. Balfour on board the *Mayflower* and sailed down the Potomac to Mount Vernon, where I desired to place a wreath on Washington's grave. After this act of reverence, I went to the room in which the Father of the American Nation had died, and stood for a moment beside his bed. In one of the rooms an inscription, placed in a frame over three swords which had belonged to Washington, attracted my eye. It read:

To each of my Nephews William Augustine Washington, George Lewis, George Steptoe Washington, Bushrod Washington and Samuel Washington, I give one of the Swords or *cutteaux* of which I may die possessed, and they are to *chuse* in the order they are named.—These swords are accompanied with an injunction not to unsheath them for the purpose of shedding blood except it be for self-defence, or in defence of their Country and it's rights; and in the latter case to keep them unsheathed, and prefer falling with them in their hands to the relinquishment thereof.

When I thought of the crisis through which we were passing, it seemed to me that this sentence, written a century before, applied with astonishing appropriateness to our own situation; for we could assure the Americans, to whom this message was addressed, that France had only drawn her sword in the defence of her liberties and that her sons would never sheathe it until they had made them secure.

An incomparable mingling of grandeur and simplicity marks this spot, where Washington passed his closing years and where he lies in his eternal slumber; gazing upon the exquisite calm which all the scene exhaled, I found myself hoping that when my hour should come, I too might find some little plot of ground where, far from the noise of the world's incessant conflict, I might sleep in peace beside my life's companion.

On the 30th, I had another interview with Mr. Baker at the War Department. As these conversations developed, I saw that the Secretary of War was moving more and more toward the determination to create a great American Army. Now that conscription was voted, the question of effectives need no longer be considered: there would be more men than could be incorporated.

The question of officers to command this army was more serious. While it is possible, when necessity drives, to make a soldier in a few months, officers—above all, those in the higher grades—and staffs cannot be improvised. The problem which faced the Americans was to create officers and non-commissioned officers who would approximate the standard of our own and of those against whom they would be pitted on the German side. To accomplish this, all existing personnel would, of course, be drawn upon; other candidates would be chosen from the most competent in every class and trade, while time would be saved by limiting the training given the younger officers to strictly essential subjects.

The problem which the manufacture of the necessary war material presented was no less grave. I knew by our own experience in 1914 that no peace-time industry, however powerful it may be, can be transformed into war manufactures without considerable delay.

The best manner of proceeding—and this is what was done—would be for the American plants to undertake everything that they could manufacture, while French industry would assume charge of the more delicate portions of the work. However, these were naturally mere suggestions; the specialists who would come over later would alone be competent to make detailed proposals.

Meantime, Mr. Baker and the officials of the War Department, General Scott and the General Staff, were working day and night to translate the general ideas which I had presented to them into definite plans conforming to American laws and customs. The President had himself kept fully informed of the progress which his Secretary of War was making in this work. After Mr. Wilson had thoroughly absorbed the questions relating to military affairs—which, most probably, he was examining for the first time in his life—he requested me to come and see him.

I went to the White House at 4 o'clock on the afternoon of May 2nd. Colonel Cosby acted as my interpreter, and when the interview was over, he drew up an accurate report of all that had been said, a copy of which he gave me.

After expressing his pleasure at being able to have a talk with me, Mr. Wilson asked me what was my opinion as to the best way of employing the American Army.

I replied by first pointing out that the military power of Germany was growing lower and lower, that she had already mobilized the 1918 class, some of which had already made its appearance on the front. This would furnish 400,000 new men, but it proved that Germany was using

up her young soldiers a year in advance—a clear sign of failing strength. In answer to a question from the President, I admitted that we also had called to the colours our 1918 class; it would furnish 170,000 trained soldiers; but we were endeavouring not to put these young men into the line too soon.

I then stated that I considered it essential that the United States should send a division to France at the earliest possible moment, in order that the American colours should be seen floating beside the Allied standards.

To this Mr. Wilson replied by asking how long I thought it would take before this division could be ready to fulfil its rôle of advanced-guard to the American forces.

“The division,” I answered, “could leave the United States almost immediately; its training could be completed in France in the space of a month; after this period of intense training, it could be gradually worked into a sector on the front. I know that this is possible, for we used the same method with the Russian troops when they arrived in France.”

By way of supporting my opinion, I pointed out to the President that it took less time to prepare troops, and especially officers, for trench warfare than it did for moving warfare; therefore, if this division was made up of men from the Regular Army, whose military training had already been completed, we could be certain of the result; the “specialist” training necessitated by trench warfare could be given by the French behind the front.

We then discussed the problem of transport. Here I emphasized the advantage accruing if the American troops were sent direct to France, without first landing them in England, as had been contemplated. I likewise suggested the importance of sending to France, ahead of the division, an American general officer with his staff, in order that he might examine the facilities for disembarkation, inspect the training camps which would be used by his troops and, later on, the sector of the front which would be assigned them.

When the question arose as to the selection of an officer to command the American Army, I naturally did not feel called upon to say anything which would influence the decision of the Government for this all-important post. I had no acquaintance with American generals, and even had such been the case I would have taken pains not to mention any names. However, I did remark that all my experience during the war went to prove the vast importance attaching to this choice, and

I added that the officer designated should not be selected because of his seniority in rank but because of his attitude to command an army.

After the President and I had examined some other questions of less importance, he inquired whether I had fully explained all my ideas to the Secretary of War. I reassured him on this point, saying that I had had several conversations with Mr. Baker and General Scott, that I and my officers had held repeated conferences at the War College and that every opportunity had been afforded me for explaining the programme I had brought over with me.

In parting, I told the President that while I was absent on the round of visits I intended to make to various cities in the United States, three of my officers would stay in Washington for the purpose of working with the American General Staff, and that before my departure I would return to the Capital for the purpose of seeing Mr. Baker and, with him, putting the finishing touches to the plan for the co-operation of the American Army.

I then took my leave. Our conversation had lasted an hour. It left me with the feeling that, while Mr. Wilson's juridical habits and turn of mind had not prepared him for the handling of military questions, he was making a sincere effort to get a grasp of such matters, now become of primary importance. He listened attentively—which is not so common a quality as one might suppose—and his keen intelligence enabled him to get to the bottom of the most difficult problems. I also had the conviction that the plans whose general outline I had just explained to him met with his approval and that nothing I had proposed ran counter either to his patriotism or to his good sense.

The day following this visit, of such capital importance, we were received by the House of Representatives. The same scenes of enthusiasm were re-enacted as had marked our reception by the Senate two days before. The Speaker was unable to place a single word; each time he commenced his voice was drowned by the shouts of the Members and the public. Then they filed by and shook our hands. Such scenes leave an impression which nothing can ever obliterate.

That evening we started for Chicago. I had been told that this city was animated by less favourable sentiments towards France than other American towns; as a matter of fact, the reception given us on our arrival on May 4th was something indescribable. The whole population was massed along our route, and acclamations, like the rolling of incessant thunder, saluted our passage. At the Auditorium we found ourselves in the presence of an immense crowd which vociferously shouted

its joy at seeing us. Words are powerless to render an idea of one's feelings when faced by such demonstrations of affection.

From this moment on I felt that the game was won. At Washington I had very quickly arrived at an understanding with the Government and the General Staff; I had observed at close range the population of the Capital and I had come into contact with many of the officials who, to so large an extent, composed it; but here I saw vibrating before my eyes the very soul of the American people—and I believe that no man whose country was being swept by invasion ever beheld a more comforting sight than the one I had the joy to look upon.

At Kansas City, where we arrived May 6th, I received for the first time—this beautiful gesture was repeated in several other towns—a very large sum of money intended for children whose fathers had been killed fighting for France. No other mark of sympathy could have touched my heart so profoundly, for it brought once more to memory my soldiers of the Marne, of Flanders and of Champagne, of Artois, Verdun and the Somme: with moistened eyes I saw again the thousand corners of the front where they had fallen—the Chemin des Dames, where even now they were dying.

On the 7th we reached St. Louis, where the Mayor, Mr. Kiel, and all the population gave us a welcome whose enthusiasm surprised us no longer, after all the attentions which had been showered upon us during the preceding days.

A similar reception was given us at Springfield, where I went to pay respectful homage to the tomb of President Lincoln. We next went to Indianapolis and Columbus.

On the 9th we reached Philadelphia, where the same demonstrations of friendship were renewed. In the room where the Declaration of Independence was signed, I was given a baton cut from a rafter of the ancient Hall. From this ceremony, I went to bow a moment before the tomb of Benjamin Franklin.

I still keep and preciousely guard another souvenir of Philadelphia: an exact reproduction of the first flag of the United States, presented to me by the Betsy Ross Society. I was also honoured by being made a Doctor of Laws by the University of Pennsylvania.

During the afternoon we reached New York. Although by this time I was accustomed to the warmth of American receptions, our arrival at Battery Place surpassed everything which we had seen and felt up to that moment. The cortège pushed its way through a crowd estimated at a million persons. As we moved up Broadway the impression was liter-

ally that of a human sea. At the City Hall, the enthusiasm became indescribable when the Mayor, Mr. John Purroy Mitchel, presented the members of the French Mission to the assembly. Mr. Choate then spoke a few warm words of welcome which brought forth new shouts of applause from the multitude.

During my stay in New York, I was the guest of Mr. Frick, who, with the utmost delicacy, had placed his entire house at my command. Popular manifestations continued all during the 10th. At a meeting in Central Park I was presented with a miniature reproduction of the Statue of Liberty, offered by subscription. In Brooklyn I was asked to inaugurate a statue of Lafayette, and a sword was presented to me. The Merchants' Association gave us a reception. Columbia University made me a Doctor of Laws, and at a gala performance at the Opera a great sum was collected in the space of a few minutes for French war orphans. Everywhere marks of affection were showered upon us. In the midst of the varied programme which filled our day, I found time to visit the Tomb of General Grant, for whom I have always had a strong admiration.

The next day a delegation conferred upon me honorary membership in the Society of the Cincinnati, after which I went to West Point. Here I reviewed the cadets of the Military Academy and was given an opportunity of admiring their magnificent martial bearing. On the 13th we arrived in Boston, where I visited the celebrated University of Harvard and received for the third time the degree of Doctor of Laws. I then left for Canada.

My visit here was all too short; but I could not pass so close to this beautiful country, which had sent thousands of brave and magnificent soldiers to the Great War, without stopping for a few hours to carry its people the affectionate greetings of France—in whose bosom, alas, so many of their sons lay buried.

After a short stop in Baltimore, we arrived again in Washington, where I was to have a final conference with Mr. Baker and the officers of the American General Staff.

This meeting, which was destined to put in final form the agreement with the military authorities had already established in principle, took place at 2 p.m. in the office of the Secretary of War. There were present Mr. Baker, Generals Scott, Bliss and Kuhn, and Lieutenant-Colonel Fabry, my chief of staff.

A memorandum had been drawn up to serve as a basis for discussion. Mr. Baker and Generals Bliss and Kuhn each had a copy in English of this document. It specified that a first division of from 16,000 to 20,000



men would embark on or about June 1st and be assembled in the zone of the French Army. The division was to be composed of 4 regiments of infantry, 12 batteries of field artillery, 6 heavy batteries and the corresponding services.

A maritime base was to be immediately established at La Pallice to serve the needs of the American forces arriving in France. Succeeding units, after being given their elementary training at home, would be transported to France as they became ready, the schedule of sailings being communicated beforehand to the French Government. The training of these units would then be pursued in camps established in the zones of the French Army.

This memorandum was read aloud, paragraph by paragraph, and the Secretary of War gave it his approval without suggesting any changes; I did the same, on my part. In this way the proposals presented in rough form to Mr. Baker on my arrival April 26th, as afterwards completed and defined, now became adopted by the American Government.

As I stated in the report which I made to the French Government on my return to Paris, it seemed to me a matter for serious congratulation that the American Government should have shown such willing purpose in examining the plan I had submitted to them, while the quickness of decision they had displayed in adopting it, was a result far in excess of anything we had reason to expect. In the space of fifteen days a programme of co-operation had been adopted, the most important decisions had been taken, and the advanced-guard of the American Army was about to sail for Europe. All this argued well for the future.

Mr. Baker now asked leave to present the officer who had just been designated to command the Expeditionary Forces going to France. I naturally expressed the great pleasure I would have in making his acquaintance. The Secretary left the room for an instant and returned accompanied by General Pershing. As I held his hand, Mr. Baker sketched to me his brilliant military services. I caught the words New Mexico, Dakota, Cuba, the Mexican Frontier. What struck me immediately in the new Commander-in-Chief were the intelligence and energy stamped upon his countenance and expressed by his whole bearing. Turning to Mr. Baker, I said, "He is a fine-looking soldier and he will soon be commanding millions of men. Please tell him that he can always count on me for anything in my power."

A few minutes later, I went to take leave of the President. I expressed my gratitude for his kindness and told him of the intense emotion which had been caused me by the reception I had met with everywhere

during my rapid journey through the country, adding that I would keep to my dying day the recollection of the vibrating affection of which we had been the object during our stay. I ended by expressing the hope of soon seeing an American army fighting on the front beside our own and the Allied soldiers.

At midnight we sailed for France on board the *Lorraine*. This time my rôle in the war was definitely over.

The place which the American soldiers made for themselves during the supreme crisis of the war, in 1918, is known to everybody. When the Armistice was declared, over two million of them had crossed the Atlantic without untoward incident. During the hard struggle which it cost the Allies to stop the German attacks, as well as during the victorious offensives which carried us to final success, the American divisions, sometimes generously mingled with French and British troops, sometimes under General Pershing's personal command—at Saint-Mihiel, on the Meuse, at Montfaucon, in the Argonne—took a glorious part in the operations. The agreement I had signed with the American Government thus received, during the last year of the war, the final consecration of the battle-field, and I consider it my duty to close these pages by expressing the admiration for the American Nation and the American Army which I so sincerely feel.

During the days I spent in Washington, negotiating with the Government regarding the military participation of America in the war, I quickly grasped the fact that both the statesmen and the soldiers with whom I was dealing believed that the interests of their country demanded that the United States should join us in the war. Germany had been guilty of such serious blunders, especially in the prosecution of her submarine warfare, she had so completely alienated all sympathy from her cause, that Allied diplomats found small difficulty in rallying to our side those who had continued to hesitate. Moreover, while until now the United States had remained faithful to their policy of isolation, here was an unexpected opportunity of proving to Europe the extent of her power and reaping the benefits of a long and fruitful neutrality. The enthusiastic reception which official America gave our Mission thus found itself explained as much by reasons of interest as by the impulse of sentiment.

But what of the people?—the unreflecting mass, those who in general obey only their instincts, unmoved by the force of political reasons—the people, who might justly see in this war only a terrible calamity in which

they were invited to share; the people, who were about to be asked to send their sons and brothers across a submarine-infested ocean to fight on a distant shore—what reason had they to shout us their welcome?

And yet, as I have just said in the short description I have tried to give of our journey through the country, wherever I went I saw them vibrating with patriotic fervour, acclaiming France with ardent affection, overwhelming me and my officers with the signs of a passionate feeling, which might have been expected had it been we who had saved America.

This is something I can never forget; and it is the last memory I wish to carry to my tomb, where it will mingle with the gratitude I bear the soldiers I led during two and a half years of the most frightful war in history.

Politics, influenced as they so often are by despicable motives, have since found means, from time to time, to embitter the feelings between Americans and ourselves; but when I look back upon those few brief weeks in the spring of 1917 and live through them again in writing these lines, when I remember those eager faces, those hands stretched out to clasp our own, when I hear again the shouts of joy which greeted our passage, I cannot believe that these misunderstandings can ever persist. And I wish to die sustained by the hope that France and the United States will never forget that at two tragic moments in their history they drew their swords to fight side by side for right and liberty, and did not sheathe them again until, by a victory won together, they had saved the most sacred of all causes.

J. JOFFRE

Louveciennes, June, 1925.

## APPENDIX



## NOTE BY THE TRANSLATOR

The following material drawn from the body of Marshal Joffre's manuscript deals with what took place in the years preceding the war in the matter of military appropriations, light and heavy artillery, ammunition, camps of instruction, and the Law of July, 1913, increasing the terms of French military service to three years. These pages have an important bearing upon French Parliamentary history during this period. They show the efforts made by the military authorities to obtain sufficient money and war material to permit the French Army to meet the German invasion with hope of success. The years passed in review are those running from 1904 to the outbreak of war, and while it is interesting for the student of history to see how wholly impotent were the military chiefs, and indeed, the Minister of War, to obtain money and munitions in the face of political opposition, the general reader, and above all the foreign reader, would find the statistics given in these chapters uninteresting.

The long recital of unsuccessful efforts to get the Army in shape for the impending war is a heart-breaking record, brightened only by the proof it furnishes, that men like M. Millerand, M. Messimy, General Langlois, and General Joffre had done everything in their power to make ready for the conflict.

The section on artillery will surprise many, even in France, who are unacquainted with the repeated recommendations and urgent pleadings on the part of General Joffre for long-range field artillery and heavy howitzers, capable of doing the same work in campaign as was accomplished to the detriment of the French by the German pieces of 4-inch and 6-inch calibre.

But the politicians were not alone responsible for France's inferiority in this matter when the war opened. The Artillery Department, and many artillery officers of prominence, have to bear their share in the responsibility. It must be remembered that at this time all France was justly enthusiastic over the marvellous performance of the 75 mm. gun, which represented so great an advance over the German field-piece; a too great confidence in the possibilities of this weapon joined to bureaucratic inertia and the difficulties of obtaining appropriations, all had their share in causing the persistent refusal, year after year, and in one form or another, of General Joffre's recommendations urging the adoption of heavy field-pieces with high angle fire. This is a pitiful story, but its perusal would delay the reader too long, impatient as he must be to begin the recital of the days just preceding the war, and

to hear from the lips of its principal actor the details of the tragic days which succeeded each other between August 20th and September 6th, and then to follow the unfolding of the Marne manœuvre and the great battle itself.

For these reasons it has been thought best to make a résumé of certain chapters of the manuscript and to place it in an appendix to this volume, rather than to allow it to remain in its original place in the Marshal's memoirs.

## APPENDIX TO PART I

### PREPARATION OF THE WAR BUDGETS (1911-1914)

When Marshal Joffre took over as Chief Engineer to the Army in 1904, he found that a programme had been approved in 1900 for the expenditure of 90 million francs on the fortifications on the eastern frontier. The yearly appropriations were so insignificant that it would have taken 20 years to complete the programme. Such a delay was out of the question, for the "works would be obsolete before they were completed."

The Marshal's requests for increased appropriations for 1905 were refused by the then Minister of War, General André. Referring to the charge for 1906, and considering it indispensable that the fortifications should be completed in 6 years, he pressed for an appropriation for that year of some 12 million francs for the works at Verdun, Toul, Epinal and Belfort. This request was again refused, and the credit maintained at slightly under 4 million francs.

This refusal was all the more extraordinary in view of the strained relations with Germany arising out of the Moroccan situation, which culminated with the visit of the Kaiser to Tangier in 1905 and the subsequent forced resignation of the French Foreign Minister, M. Delcassé. The situation was such that a meeting of Marshal Joffre and the Chief Engineers of the fortresses was convened by the Minister of War to examine what urgent measures could be taken to remedy the deficiencies resulting from the delay in executing the 1900 programme.

Extra appropriations were, as a matter of fact, made, and a further credit of 3 million francs was allotted in July, 1905.

At the beginning of 1906, shortly after M. Etienne had become Minister of War, a sum of 13 million francs, in addition to the yearly appropriation of 4 millions, was allotted for work on the eastern fortifications.

That War Ministries are not always responsible for deficiencies on the outbreak of a war—and it is patent that there were great deficiencies in matériel in 1914—is shown by the fact that, for the years 1901-1909, total credits of some 740 millions were asked for and only 425 millions voted.

One result of this, and an important one, was the very small amount it was possible to assign to the improvements of the Railway system, the total appropriation for which in 1909 amounted to 850,000 francs.

It is interesting to compare the expenditure on military services, for the same period, by France and Germany. Between 1901 and 1905, France spent an average of 47 millions yearly, and Germany an average of 115 millions.



The average figures for the years 1906 to 1910 were respectively 95 and 190 millions.

In 1911, when Marshal Joffre was appointed Chief of the General Staff, it is not surprising, therefore, that he found the French Army far behind the Germans in regard to matériel.

The situation at this date was as follows: Of a total supply of 3 million rifles, some 40,000 were unserviceable and 42,000 part worn. For the first-line formations, 2½ million rifles, in good condition, were available. Although it did not embody the latest improvements, the rifle compared sufficiently favourably with the German one to preclude the expenditure of 465 millions which the provision of a new rifle would have entailed.

With regard to the field artillery, guns were complete and in good condition, but the supply of ammunition was inadequate. This had been increased, since 1906, to 1280 rounds per gun, but it was considered essential to raise this to 1500. No steps had been taken to prepare for mass production by private manufacture, on mobilization, and no money was forthcoming for this purpose.

No very great effort had been made in France to keep pace with Germany in the supply of heavy artillery and light siege guns. Further large sums were needed for increasing the number of 155 mm. guns.

Large sums of money were needed for the improved training of troops of all arms, including field firing and artillery practice camps. Other items entailing increased expenditure were the supply of field kitchens, the improvement and lightening of the soldiers' equipment, the provision of field bridging material, etc.

Directly after his appointment in 1911, Marshal Joffre obtained the consent of the War Minister, M. Messimy, for the equipment of the field armies to take precedence over that of the fortresses. A total military credit for 1912 of 119 millions was finally appropriated. This included 13 millions for the air service.

At the end of 1911, a total of 246 millions was agreed upon as "extraordinary credits" for the next 5 years, of which 33 millions were to be expended in 1912. At this time, M. Caillaux's Ministry fell and he was replaced by M. Poincaré, with M. Millerand as War Minister. The "extraordinary credit" was reduced to 51 millions, of which 21 millions were to be expended in 1912. This, therefore, gave the War Ministry a total credit for 1912 of 140 millions—as against a German expenditure for the same year of 216 millions.

In 1911, the principle was adopted by the Supreme War Council of reverting to the 3-year compulsory service, and Parliament voted the necessary credit to maintain under the Colours the class about to be discharged.

Early in 1913, it was decided at a meeting held under the presidency of M. Briand, the new Prime Minister, that the question of immediate engagement in advance of a part of the expenses included in the 1912 programme should be examined in secret committee. This proposal was divulged by *Le Temps*, which published the general outline of the project. The Finance Committee of the Chamber at once stepped in and demanded that all engagements in advance should be submitted to Parliament. A supplementary credit

of 500 millions was, therefore, asked for, subsequently reduced to 420 millions, as an invention enabling the 75 mm. gun to execute high-angle fire rendered unnecessary the 80 millions which had been included for the provision of field howitzers. In March, 1913, authority was voted for the immediate engagement of a total of 293 millions to be expended over varying periods of years, for increase in the supply of 75 mm. ammunition, substitution of steel for cast-iron shell, work on the fortresses on the eastern and north-eastern frontiers, provision of 105 and 155 mm. guns, training camps, etc.

In the following month, Marshal Joffre asked for the 420 million credit to be increased by 504 millions for further supplies of 75 mm. ammunition, provision of long range heavy artillery, mobile wireless, field kitchens, etc.

At the outset, the Finance Minister gave agreement to an increase only of 30 millions, instead of the 504 asked for. It must not be forgotten that enormous sums would be required for the application of the 3-year law.

The next step was an attempt to find a solution by combining the two programmes (420 and 504 millions). After various meetings a programme was drawn up comprising a grand total of 1403 millions as follows:

803 millions supplementary credit, to be appropriated at once in the place of the 420 millions;

305 millions for "extraordinary" expenses;

295 millions for works of secondary importance.

Discussions in regard to this programme were interrupted by a fresh change in the Ministry. Further delay was occasioned by the elections in April, 1914, so that the final figures were only voted shortly before the outbreak of the war. They were 416½ millions plus 754½ millions supplementary credits.

The main causes of the confusion and delays in the drawing up and voting of the military budgets lay in the want of co-ordination between the Directors of the various Services, the frequent changes of Ministry—there were eight between 1911 and the outbreak of the war—and the preponderating powers of the *Direction of Control*. This body worked directly with the parliamentary commissions, and was unaffected by the various changes of Ministeries and so, in the end, it was this body which drew up the budgets in their final form.

#### LIGHT AND HEAVY ARTILLERY

Up to 1905, the French field artillery was undoubtedly superior to that of the Germans. The rate of fire of the 75 mm. gun was unequalled and it could be used with effect against defiladed troops. The 155 mm. gun had been adapted for use against semi-permanent works and had been rendered more mobile than the light siege artillery. Its effective range, however, was no more than 5400 yards.

As compared with the 75 mm. gun the Germans had, at that time, only the old-model 77 mm. gun, without brake. In 1901 they had adopted a 105 mm. field howitzer, which, however, was known to have many defects.

As from 1905, the Germans began to make up ground. Their 77 mm. gun was modified to give rapid fire and they introduced the 15 cm. howitzer into

their field armament. In 1909, the 105 mm. howitzer was converted to rapid fire and, at about the same period, they began experiments, which progressed very rapidly, in the extended use in counter-battery work of heavy artillery with delay-action fuses. The next step was the adoption of the principle of opening a battle by a systematic engagement of the hostile artillery, and the consequent early employment of heavy artillery. The French methods of fire were adopted for the new model 77 mm. gun; the 15 cm. batteries were converted into horsed batteries, and the number of 105 mm. howitzers was doubled, and a like number of the 77 mm. suppressed.

In France, the intense activity which had brought the artillery to the point it had reached in 1905 was followed by a period of inaction. In addition to this, there existed a considerable divergence of opinion among the artillery experts. Some maintained that the high explosive 75 mm. shell would be all that was needed, apart from exceptional cases where the 155 mm. would be required. This hypothesis was favoured by the protagonists of the offensive "at any cost," whose idea of the use of artillery in battle was merely that of supporting the infantry.

It was not considered that the Germans would be able to derive much advantage from the much longer range of some of their guns as compared with the French field artillery. It was thought useless to attempt to fire at ranges beyond the normal radius of observation of the captain of the battery, who would remain close to his guns. The maximum was judged to be 6500 yards.

As soon as he became Chief of the General Staff in 1911, Marshal Joffre took up most energetically the question of heavy artillery, in an endeavour to correct the inferiority then existing *vis-à-vis* Germany.

A committee was set up, presided over by General Lamothe, to study the question of a field howitzer and a long-range gun. This committee went rapidly to work and, in a month, submitted their conclusions. The field howitzer was to be rapid-fire, as mobile as the 75 mm. gun, with a wide angle of fire and as long a range as possible. The long-range gun was to have an effective range of some 8 miles, and to have a team of 6 or 8 horses.

Models were called for from both the Government arsenals and private works, and were to be submitted in February, 1912.

In the meantime, a proposal was made, as a temporary measure, to provide heavy artillery for the Army by forming regiments to be armed with some of the 120 mm. and 220 mm. guns with the siege and fortress artillery. This proposal encountered much opposition but, in the end, a certain number of regiments of foot artillery were formed and armed with guns from coast-defence batteries, one regiment being armed with material from the fortress of Bange. This latter was sent to the XX Corps (General Foch) at Nancy for the defences of the Grand Couronné.

In March, 1912, the Schneider works submitted a 105 mm. howitzer. Preliminary tests proved satisfactory and a battery was ordered for trial at the artillery practice camp and in the autumn manoeuvres.

After long discussion, and protracted trials, 220 long-range guns of 105 mm. Creusot model, were ordered in 1913. This order was later on reduced to

36, which were brought into use at the outset of the war. Its range was some 13,300 yards, the shell weighing  $37\frac{1}{2}$  lbs. It was, in effect, merely a 75 mm. gun on a somewhat larger scale, and was in no way a heavy gun.

The further trials of the field howitzer proved satisfactory and its adoption was recommended, but credits for manufacture were refused at the instance of the technical services. A campaign was started against the field howitzer and Major Malandrin's invention, which enabled the trajectory of the 75 mm. gun to be heightened, was finally adopted in its stead. The main objections to this were the weight of the projectile, which was much less than that of the German howitzer, and the reduced range.

By great persistence, Marshal Joffre finally obtained sanction, in February, 1914, for studies to be made with the object of lengthening the range of the 75 mm. gun, and of evolving a 120 mm. howitzer with a range equal to the German 15 cm. one. Trials were carried out in July, 1914, but this was too late and the war found the French without a field howitzer.

With regard to the heavy artillery, its development was restricted at the outset by the want of personnel, but the advent of the 3-year law enabled provision to be made for 15 new batteries.

The law of April 14, 1914, authorized the creation of 5 regiments of heavy artillery, but these were still in course of formation when mobilization started. It had been found impossible to allot heavy artillery permanently to each army corps, as had been done by the Germans. At the outbreak of hostilities, there were only 16 groups of heavy artillery for 21 army corps. As it was considered out of the question to divide this artillery into formations smaller than a group, it was apportioned as army artillery.

At the beginning of August, 1914, each French army corps had but 120 guns of 75 mm. firing a 16 lb. projectile; while a German corps had 108 guns of 77 mm., 36 howitzers of 105 mm. firing a 33 lb. projectile, and 16 heavy howitzers of 15 cm. firing a 92 lb. projectile.

The situation in regard to heavy artillery was still more unsatisfactory.

The French armies had only 104 Rimailho guns of 155 mm., 96 Bacquet guns of 120 mm. and 20 batteries of the long 120 mm. gun, with "Cingoli" mounting; as against a German total of 848 guns, made up of 360 guns of 10 cm., 360 guns of 13 cm., and 128 howitzers of 21 cm.

With regard to siege artillery, light siege material on mobilization comprised only old-model 120 mm. guns modified by the "Cingoli" mounting and tractor-drawn, and short 155 mm. guns on a movable platform. The heavy material consisted of long 155 mm. guns with "Cingoli" mounting, short 155's and 220 mm. howitzers with metal platforms.

18 howitzers of 280 mm. with a range of  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles had been ordered in November, 1913, but were due for delivery only between November, 1915, and November, 1916. In June, 1914, 120 long-recoil mountings, converting the long 155 mm. gun to long-range rapid fire ( $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles) were ordered, to be delivered between December, 1915, and December, 1917.

It is not generally known that information was obtained by the French in 1913 that the Germans had recently taken into service various types of *Minenwerfer*. In October of that year, Marshal Joffre asked the service concerned to

have urgent studies made of similar weapons, which were non-existent in the French Army. Repeated requests elicited the reply, at the beginning of 1914, that no result could be expected within a definite period. The Marshal then proposed that an order should be given to private firms for "trench mortars," for use with the engineer units. This was refused; nothing more was done in this direction so that the French Army was entirely without "mine throwers" when the war started.

The study of trench mortars had, however, been continued by a Major Duchêne of the Engineers who succeeded in evolving a satisfactory weapon. In November, 1914, when it was found urgently necessary to produce a "mine-thrower," the same Major Duchêne was attached to the Staff of the Chief Engineer for this purpose.

#### AMMUNITION SUPPLY

In 1906, the supply of ammunition for the 75 mm. gun amounted only to 700 rounds per gun. At the instance of M. Messimy, this supply was to be increased to 1200 rounds per gun by the end of 1912 and, in another 5½ years, to 1500 rounds.

When Marshal Joffre took over the duties of Chief of the General Staff in 1911, at the time of the Agadir crisis, 940 rounds per gun had been provided for 3900 guns. Spare parts for a further 200 rounds per gun were held in magazine ready to be assembled on mobilization. From 1906 to 1911, this increase had cost 62 millions.

Discussions ensued as to the relative supply of the French and German field artillery. Marshal Joffre maintained that the expenditure of ammunition by rapid-fire guns would be very heavy, that the numerical inferiority of the French field artillery should be compensated by a larger supply of ammunition, and that it was essential to increase the fire power of the 75's in view of the German superiority in heavy artillery.

Approval was, therefore, given to reduce the period to 4 years, during which supply was to be increased from 1200 to 1500 rounds per gun. This entailed an extra expenditure of 10 millions in 1912 and of 14½ millions in 1913. The rate of manufacture was, however, slowed down, owing to the difficulty of increasing the production of explosives.

The Balkan wars, and a series of experiments carried out at the beginning of 1914, showed the necessity of increasing the allotment per gun to 3000 rounds. On mobilization, this figure was far from being reached—the actual supply was 1390 rounds per gun, of which 200 rounds per gun were not yet assembled.

A "plan of manufacture" had been drawn up in 1909, for the production of 75 mm. shell after mobilization. This provided for the assembly and loading, before the 50th day, of 800,000 shell cartridges (554,000 shrapnel and 246,000 high explosives)—that is, 25,000 cartridges daily. As from the 51st day, production was to amount to 13,600 cartridges a day (7900 shrapnel and 5700 high explosives). A first reserve of raw material was established for 600,000 cartridges of 75 mm. and 10,000 for the 155 mm. C.T.R. Of the

total daily output for the 75 mm. shell, private manufacture was to be responsible for 3500.

The importance of private manufacture was so completely ignored that, in February, 1914, various establishments were notified that their contracts for the supply of ammunition in war time would not be renewed on expiry. Private works would be required merely to supply the empty cases. Marshal Joffre, on learning of this, at once asked M. Messimy, the War Minister, to assure the continued collaboration of private manufacture. It was only on August 1, 1914, that M. Messimy obtained authority for this, which was not placed on a sound basis until M. Millerand became Minister of War.

### TRAINING CAMPS

Marshal Joffre's two main preoccupations when he entered on his duties as Chief of the General Staff in 1911 were the artillery question and the training camps.

The average sum to be expended yearly on training camps, under the 1897 and 1908 programmes, was 3 millions, at which rate the 1908 programme would be concluded in 1930! In 1911, 8 camps were still incomplete; barely one-third of the troops were able to carry out a 15-day course yearly, and some units were unable to attend at all owing to the distribution of the camps.

Germany, on the other hand, had taken steps to set up a divisional training camp in each corps.

In view of the urgent necessity of adequate training for all arms, Marshal Joffre drew up a programme based on the following principles:

- (a) Training camps were to be sufficiently large for exercising a complete division—some 14,500 acres.
- (b) For financial reasons, camps were to be distributed as to 1 camp for 2 army corps.

In accordance with these principles, there were proposed:

2 Corps camps (Châlons and Mailly)

10 Divisional camps. Of the 4 already existing, 3 would have to be enlarged. Six entirely new ones would have to be created.

The expense entailed would be 132 millions spread over 7 years; namely, 12 millions for 1912 and 20 millions for each of the succeeding 6 years.

This programme was submitted to the War Minister, M. Messimy, who approved it in December, 1911. The credits for this were, however, struck out by the new Ministers for War and Finance early in 1912. Marshal Joffre insisted on the necessity for improving the existing training camps and creating those which had been proposed. His arguments were strengthened by information lately to hand concerning the new German military laws, and M. Millerand approved, in principle, a programme for a supplementary credit of 2 millions in 1912 for the divisional camp at Coëtquidan, for a credit of 17 millions for 1913, and 5 further yearly credits of 20 millions each.

With very great difficulty, and at the Marshal's repeated instigation, M. Millerand succeeded in obtaining the 2 millions for 1912 and 13 millions

for 1913. As a matter of fact, however, all that could finally be allotted for 1913 was 7,350,000 francs.

These delays cost the Treasury very dear. In spite of the precautions that had been taken, information had leaked out and, when authority was at last given for the purchase of ground, it was found necessary to pay prices greatly in excess of the original valuations.

It was only on the eve of the war that the fundamental question of training camps was settled. The necessary credits were allotted for the rapid execution of the 1911 programme, which it was hoped to complete in 1918. The first studies of this question had been undertaken in 1897!

In 1913, the 3-year law appeared certain to be adopted. This would increase the strength of the reserve units, which Marshal Joffre proposed to assemble for training in camps, instead of in the garrison towns as heretofore. An immediate solution was necessary, but camps of large extent were not required for these regiments and brigades. A programme was, therefore, drawn up for the quartering and training of reserve regiments on old artillery and rifle ranges, which had become too small for the regular units. Eleven camps were arranged for. The total cost was estimated at 15 millions of which it was found possible to expend a credit of 250,000 francs in 1913.

#### THE THREE-YEAR SERVICE LAW

The recruiting law of 1905 had imposed equality of military service on all classes, but it appears to have considerably weakened the efficiency of the mounted arms, particularly the cavalry.

In regard to the cavalry, there was a lack of effectives, inadequate training of the 2-year soldier and of the horse, and a shortage of really good horsemen. This situation was aggravated by the fact that, during winter, it would be possible to mobilize only one class of cavalry soldier.

A large number of voluntary enlistments and re-engagements had been hoped for, but expectations were not realized.

In 1911, the attention of the War Minister was called to the state of the cavalry. M. Messimy fully appreciated the gravity of the situation, and endeavoured to obtain a vote on various measures directed towards the increase of the effectives of the cavalry and horsed batteries, and even to attract men to engage for 3 years. Finally, in 1913, he instructed the General Staff to study the technical aspect of providing the cavalry with the required number of trained soldiers, while he himself undertook to deal with the political issues involved.

The question of the 3-year service was thus brought up, but the problem no longer concerned the cavalry alone. The whole army was weakened as a consequence of the short service and of the lack of professional soldiers. On the discharge of each class, there remained but a single contingent of trained men with the Colours, with the result that, during the winter months, the covering force became dangerously weak.

Moreover, the reduced strength of the contingents no longer enabled units

to be kept up to the prescribed strengths, which were already considerably below those of the corresponding German formations.

The lack of effectives naturally affected adversely the training; even in units up to normal strength there were few private soldiers available for daily training during their second year's service. Units were never able to manoeuvre at full war strength. It became impossible to create the technical units required to keep pace with scientific developments and the experiences of recent wars. Finally, Morocco absorbed a large number of men, who were no longer available for the defence of the Home country.

This was the situation in February, 1913, when the first information was received regarding the new measures proposed by Germany. Successive increases had been voted by her culminating, in February, 1913, in the increase by one-fifth of the peace strength of her army. By the 1913 law, the budgetary strength of the German army was to be increased by 4000 officers, 15,000 N.C.O.'s, 117,000 men and 27,000 horses. The increase of strength of existing active formations, or the creation of new ones, was alone contemplated. The fighting value of all units was thus greatly augmented, as the *cadres* would henceforth include professional soldiers having at least 2 years' service in the unmounted units and 3 years in the mounted. No fighting unit would have more than one-third of reservists, most of whom would belong to the last class discharged. Peace-time effectives, more particularly in the covering force, would approximate very nearly to war strengths. The German High Command had, therefore, in its hands a very powerful army, which could be rapidly and effectively mobilized. It was consequently in a position, if it so wished, to open a war against the French by an *attaque brusquée*.

It seemed, therefore, in 1913, that the sole guarantee to the French of peace, with liberty and dignity, was the maintenance of equilibrium between the French and German forces.

It was realized that the great speed with which Germany could mobilize constituted a grave danger to the frontiers, which were insufficiently protected by a weak covering force. It was essential to increase effectives and to make better use of those actually available.

With this end in view, a number of plans were made for improving matters without altering the 1905 law, but it was soon realized that no effective remedy could be provided without imposing compulsory service of 3 complete years for all.

The principle of a 3-year law was submitted to the Supreme War Council at a meeting at the Elysée in March, 1913. M. Poincaré, the President, presided, and M. Briand, the Premier, and M. Etienne, Minister of War, also attended.

Marshal Joffre pointed out that the measures which the Germans had taken in 1911 and 1912 brought the peace strength of their army up to 800,000 and that, under these conditions, nothing but a supply of horses was needed to enable this army to be mobilized. By a rapid mobilization of this description of 25 army corps, the Germans would be able to brush aside the French covering force without any difficulty.

In the Marshal's opinion, it was advisable to bring the units composing the covering force almost up to war strength, which would be completed on



the first day of mobilization by reservists living in the areas. He also advocated the increase of the covering force to 11 divisions, by the addition of the II Corps and a division from the VIII Corps. In the remaining corps, the infantry had had to supply so many men for the new formations (air force, artillery and technical troops), and its strength had been so reduced, that the training was fruitless. The proposed 3-year law would not, therefore, increase the number of units to be mobilized. In the first place, it would enable the covering force to be strengthened; secondly, mobilization would be facilitated; finally, the quality of the troops would be greatly improved.

M. Briand declared that the Government had decided to do everything possible to place the Army in a position to fulfil its mission. To enable him to reply to the objections to the 3-year law, which would certainly be raised in the Chamber of Deputies, he asked to be furnished with the most convincing arguments.

The Council finally expressed the unanimous opinion that, in view of the German measures, the military forces, and especially the covering force, should be strengthened.

Various proposals were then examined, including a system of re-engagements, a 27-month and a 30-month service.

The minimum strength to be attained, in accordance with the Marshal's indications, was 674,300 men. Allowing for a loss of 8 per cent in the fighting units on enrolment, this would entail incorporating 727,000 men.

A full 3 years' service would give 738,000 men, distributed as follows:

210,000 belonging to the last class drafted.

200,000 belonging to the class that had already served one year, losses being estimated at 5 per cent.

194,000 belonging to the class that had already served two years, losses during the 2nd year being estimated at 3 per cent.

90,000 permanent Home service (voluntary enlistments and re-enlistments).

20,000 permanent Colonial service.

9,000 belonging to the 3 contingents from the old Colonies.

15,000 found fit for service after a third medical examination, and men transferred from the auxiliary services.

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738,000 (variable, subject to modifications in either direction up to 15,000).

Three classes with the Colours, at the same time, were therefore seen to be necessary, and the Council agreed unanimously that the 3-year service was the only means of giving the required additional strength. It also recommended that no departure should be made from the principle of equality of service.

After some discussion, a bill was presented to the Chamber on March 6th to provide an active army of 700,000 as against 870,000 in Germany. Provision was made, in the proposed bill, for the dismissal on furlough, once minimum strengths had been reached, of drafted men belonging to certain categories (sons of families of more than 4 children; married men fathers of families).

As it could be assumed that one-fifth of the German forces, or about 175,000 men, would be immobilized on the Russian front, only some 695,000 would remain on the French front and equilibrium would be re-established.

An active press campaign was undertaken to mould public opinion in favour of the 3-year law, accompanied by great personal efforts throughout the country by members of the Government.

The French Government's determination was greatly strengthened, at the end of March, by the receipt from a reliable source of a copy of an official and secret report, dated March 19, 1912, by Colonel Ludendorff on the reinforcement of the German Army. This could not naturally be made public at the time. It has since been published in the French *Yellow Book* No. 2—Appendix 2.

Considering the matter to be one of urgency, the French Government decided to retain with the Colours the class due for discharge in October, 1912, thus securing without delay the three classes considered essential for security.

This decision was presented to the Chamber on May 15th and approved by 322 votes to 155. On June 2nd, the debate on the 3-year law was opened. The discussion was an extremely long one. The majority of the Deputies fully appreciated the necessity for the law, but it was evident that they were influenced by thoughts of the electoral issue.

The final vote was not taken until July 19th, when the law was passed by 358 votes to 204.

Apart from Marshal Joffre, those to whom the credit of the drafting of the law and its final acceptance were mainly due, were MM. Barthou, Etienne, Joseph Reinach and André Lefèvre.

The Marshal himself spoke on July 8th, in the place of General Pau, who was ill. He exerted himself to show that the value of troops depends on two main functions, training and cohesion, both of which entail increased peace-time effectives. Cohesion could only be assured by active troops, so that it was essential they should be sufficiently numerous to assimilate the reservists without being swamped by them.

For these reasons, the minimum strength of an infantry company (apart from the covering force) had been fixed at 140. When mobilized, the number of reservists in the company would, in any event, not exceed that number. In this manner, it could be hoped that there would not be too marked an inferiority to the German infantry company, whose strength was to be brought up to 160.

The covering force had to be brought up to war strength within a few hours, so that the strength of its infantry companies had been fixed at 200.

The urgency which was attached to the matter by M. Etienne is shown by the fact that he laid the bill before the Senate on July 22, 1913, three days after it had been voted by the Chamber. A favourable report was presented, on July 31st, by M. Doumer, the Chairman of the Army Committee, and the debate was opened on July 31st. The discussion was not unduly protracted and on July 7th, by 244 votes to 36, the Senate approved the text of the law.

## APPENDIX TO PART III

### THE MUNITIONS PROBLEM

#### I. *Artillery Matériel.*

##### (a) *The 75 mm. gun.*

There were mobilized at the start of the campaign 1011 batteries, 434 guns only remained unissued.

The deficit on September 10, 1914, amounted to 401 guns and 750 complete wagons.

To make up for the shortage, while manufacture was getting under way, 240 guns were withdrawn from Algeria, but on November 14, 1914, it still amounted to 283 guns. A certain number of batteries were temporarily armed with 90 mm. and 95 mm. guns, excellent material but with a slow rate of fire.

Owing to normal wastage, and the abnormal number of gun-bursts due to defective shell, the deficit rose, by April 10, 1915, to 800 guns.

Manufacture was intensified, shell manufacture was improved and, by August, 1915, an average number of 6 guns per day was being manufactured.

The following was, briefly, the situation on February 20, 1916:

In Line—Armies of the North-East.....	4046	
Army of the Near East.....	156	
Motor guns .....	52	4733
In Reserve—In the Interior, some being with units in course of formation .....	284	
At Depots .....	195	)

From the date of mobilization up to March 24, 1916, there had been despatched to the armies:

2833—after-carriage frames.

1340—barrels (sleeved tubes).

1385—brakes.

218—gun carriages.

3380—ammunition wagons.

##### (b) *The 105 mm. gun.*

At the time of mobilization, no artillery group of this description was in service, but matériel for the formation of 8 groups was on order. The first group was brought into service on September 16, 1914. Manufacture was proceeded with and, on January 31, 1916:

7 groups of 3 batteries each	} were in service in the armies.
1 group of 2 batteries each	

2 groups were in course of formation in the interior.

(c) *Heavy guns.*

The only heavy artillery matériel whose use had been contemplated in the field armies was the armament of the 4 regiments of heavy artillery, namely:

20 batteries of 120 mm. long.

6 " " 95

12 " " 120 " short.

26 " " 155 " C.T.R. (Rapid-fire Counter-battery).

Successive requests were made for the manufacture and supply of 120 mm. and 155 mm. guns and howitzers from the 220 mm. up to the 370 mm.

At his request, Marshal Joffre was empowered to call upon all the fortresses in the zone of the armies for supplies of heavy guns.

The following table gives an idea of the increase, during 1915, in the numbers of heavy guns in use on the front.

*Number of Guns in Service (Not including those in Fortified Places)*

Calibres mm.	Oct. 1, 1914	Jan. 1, 1915	Apr. 1, 1915	July 1, 1915	Oct. 1, 1915	Jan. 1, 1916
90.....	—	600	700	750	940	1,230
95.....	—	270	440	480	600	650
120 (long).....	60	300	550	600	900	900
120 (short).....	50	60	50	50	120	120
155 (long).....	—	190	300	320	460	470
155 (short) not including the C.T.R.....	—	110	160	190	350	320
220 Howitzers <sup>1</sup> .....	—	17	50	80	180	180
270 Howitzers <sup>2</sup> .....	—	—	—	—	30	30 <sup>a</sup>
280 Howitzers <sup>3</sup> .....	—	—	—	—	4	6 <sup>a</sup>
370 Howitzers <sup>4</sup> .....	—	—	—	—	4	10 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> In reserve.

<sup>1</sup> 220 mm. Howitzer—1880 Model.

<sup>2</sup> 270 mm. Howitzer S—1885 Model. There is a 270 mm. coast-defence Howitzer—1889 Model.

<sup>3</sup> The 280 mm. Howitzer came from the Schneider works.

<sup>4</sup> The 370 mm. Howitzer, for which Lieutenant-Colonel Filloux was responsible, was taken into service in 1915. It is a very powerful siege gun (long-range heavy artillery). It must not be confused with the 370 mm. Howitzer which was obtained by boring out a naval gun of 1887 model.

With regard to the heavier calibres, there were available in Champagne in 1915:

24—270 mm. coast-defence howitzers.

16—100 mm. guns—T.R. (Rapid Fire).

4—14 cm. "

4—16 cm. "

24—19 cm. "

1—274 mm. gun.

(d) *Trench Artillery.*

At the beginning of the war, Trench Artillery did not exist and had, therefore, to be evolved.

A first order for 58 mm. trench guns (after the model invented by Major Duchêne) was placed in January, 1915. In February a modified type, firing an 88 lb. bomb, was perfected.

A first supply of 40 guns was made in February, 1915, which was increased by September, 1915, to 1050 guns. In 1916, 1000 guns with a longer range were supplied. In June, 1915, orders were placed for 300 trench mortars of 240 mm., with a range of 880 yards and firing a 200 lb. projectile.

(e) *Light Artillery.*

A light hand-drawn gun was found necessary for close use in wooded country and village fighting.

In the first place, the 80 mm. mountain gun was used, the first battery being sent to the front in October, 1914. Later on, a light rapid-fire gun was found to be required for use in the front-line trenches, and for accompanying infantry in an advance. The 37 mm. gun was found very suitable. First supplies were obtained from the Navy and, in 1915, a further 1000 were supplied from manufacture.

II. *Tanks.*

In January, 1916, a Colonel Estienne had submitted a design for armoured motor vehicles, consisting of a modification of the Holt tractor. Trials proved satisfactory and, on January 31, 1916, 400 were ordered.

In April, 1916, a new and improved type armed with a 75 mm. gun was brought out by the Saint-Chamond Company, and 400 were ordered.

III. *Anti-Aircraft Defence.*

At the time of mobilization, the organization of the Anti-Aircraft defence was still undeveloped. There existed only one section of two motor-guns. Orders had been placed for 15 more sections, for delivery at various future dates. During the first months of the war, the armies made up their want of matériel by fortuitous means.

In November, 1915, 60 sections of guns were asked for. Some 3 ft. and, later on, 100-4 ft. searchlights were attached to the anti-aircraft posts.

IV. *Rifles and Machine Guns.*(a) *Rifles.*

There existed on August 1, 1914:

2,800,000 rifles	—1886-93 pattern
220,000 carbines	—1890       “
384,000 muskets	—1892       “
772 rifles	—1907       “

There were, in addition:

1,260,000 rifles	—1874 pattern
(about) 100,000 repeating rifles,	Kropatchek pattern, purchased in 1886.

Infantry fighting soldiers, on mobilization, numbered 1,100,000. There remained therefore some 1,700,000 rifles in the interior.

The estimated losses in rifles during the first eight months of war amounted, in April, 1915, to 700,000.

Production increased from 20,000 in June, 1915, to

33,000 in July
43,000 in August
47,000 in September
50,000 in October
52,000 in November
58,000 in December.

The reserve of rifles, which had fallen to 250,000 in the middle of 1915, had already increased in November of that year to 300,000, in spite of the formation of many new units. This reserve increased still further at the beginning of 1916, and in April of that year, amounted to 450,000.<sup>1</sup>

(b) *Machine Guns.*

On August 1, 1914, there were 5,106 machine guns, distributed as to 2020 in the armies, 2886 in fortresses and 200 at the Saint-Etienne works. These weapons were, for the greater part, of the 1907 pattern, made at the Saint-Etienne works. This pattern only was in use in the armies, and each battalion had a section of 2 guns.

It was soon made clear that this initial supply was inadequate and manufacture was pressed forward.

In January, 1915, 283 machine guns a month were being turned out. The monthly output had increased by December, 1915, to 1199.

On January 1, 1916, the number of machine guns in the armies was nearly 11,000, as compared with 5000 at the beginning of the war.

In February, 1916, it was judged that the daily output of 44 guns was sufficient, both for the needs of the French armies and for supplying the Allies. Manufacturers' efforts were, therefore, directed towards the production of the automatic rifle and light machine gun.

V. *The Supply of Ammunition.*

(a) *75 mm. Shell.*

On mobilization there existed 4,866,167 shell-cases. In view of the formation of the new batteries (240 guns) under Plan XVII, there was a shortage in supply of some 500,000 cases.

The war-time plan of manufacture comprised:

- a) Assembly, before the 50th day, of 800,000 shell-cases, at the rate of 25,000 a day, from the finished parts already existing in the reserve workshops.
- b) Following this, the complete manufacture of 13,600 rounds a day.

At the close of the battle of the Marne, more than half the initial supply per gun had been expended, and there remained no more than 2,370,000

<sup>1</sup> A large number of rifles had been supplied to Allied armies; Russian, Serbian and Belgian. These consisted for the greater part of the Kropatchek and 1874 pattern rifles.

shell-cases. Skilled workmen were at once recalled from the armies, for work in the factories.

The operations of the "Race to the Sea" and the battle of Flanders reduced supplies to below 400 rounds a gun.

Temporary measures were taken, such as withdrawing 75 mm. ammunition from the Colonies, manufacture of cast-iron shell, etc.

The following table shows the rate of manufacture of 75 mm. shell, as from December, 1914:

Date	Supplies to General Reserve Depots	Daily Average
December, 1914.....	1,029,666	34,322
January, 1915.....	1,315,525	43,854
February ".....	1,073,101	35,770
March ".....	1,865,184	62,173
April ".....	2,037,030	67,901
May ".....	1,507,944	50,264
June ".....	1,043,270	68,109
July ".....	2,559,038	85,301
August ".....	2,372,447	79,081
September ".....	2,873,355	95,778
October ".....	3,529,069	117,635
November ".....	2,878,395	95,946
December ".....	2,533,810	84,460
January, 1916.....	3,486,993	116,233
February ".....	3,541,757	118,058
March ".....	4,092,000	132,000

(b) *Heavy Artillery Ammunition.*

On August 2, 1914, there existed in siege batteries and fortresses:

800,000 shell, calibre	90 mm.	including	60,000 high explosive
655,000 "	"	95 "	" 240,000 "
1,000,000 "	"	120 "	" 460,000 "
1,490,000 "	"	155 "	" 930,000 "
212,000 "	"	220 "	
27,000 "	"	270 "	

The only manufacture of heavy shell that had been contemplated during the war, was 465 high explosive shell a day for the 155 mm. C.T.R. guns.

It soon became evident, however, that existing supplies would not meet the requirements of the armies.

The first orders placed were for cast-iron shell exclusively. All the available steel was employed in the more urgent manufacture of 75 mm. shell. The initial orders were small, which is explained by the reluctance of iron foundries to restart their furnaces. These had all been closed down on mobilization and difficulties were encountered in regard to labour and raw material.

In December, 1914, M. Millerand had a meeting with manufacturers and with the greatest difficulty succeeded in arranging for a daily order of 3,000

steel 155 mm. shell to be carried out, without detriment to the output of the 75 mm. shell.

Frequent and ever-increasing demands were made by the Marshal for supplies of heavy shell.

In January, 1915, he asked for a daily output of 6000 90 mm. and 3000 155 mm. shell.

Finally, in July, 1915, the daily output asked for was:

50 shell—293 mm.	10,000 shell—120 mm.
180 " —280 mm.	4,600 " —105 mm.
1,000 " —270 mm.	10,000 " —95 mm.
3,000 " —220 mm.	12,000 " —90 mm.
12,000 " —155 mm.	

Estimates were fulfilled in the case of the more important calibres and between April 20 and 30, 1916, output rose to 19,000 for the 155 mm. and 11,000 for the 120 mm. guns.

### (c) Gas Shell.

In the month of May, 1915, after the German cloud-gas attacks in the Ypres region, it was clear that the question of gas-shell had to be taken up.

The first order was for 50,000 75 mm. shell loaded with sulphide of carbon and phosphorus.

In June and July, increased output was asked for for gas-shell of 75 mm., 120 mm. and 155 mm.

Various experiments were made, in the meanwhile, as to the possible use of incendiary shell, but these did not give the results hoped for.

The output of tear-gas shell remained for a long time in a backward state, owing to difficulties of manufacture and the unsatisfactory trials carried out with the only product readily obtainable (chloracetone).

On the other hand, a certain number of shell was successfully loaded with collongite and orders were given for 15,000 "special" shell to be loaded daily.

The following had been supplied to armies by September 30, 1915:

100,000 75 mm. shell loaded with chloride of sulphur. These had little effect and manufacture was stopped.

15,000 75 mm. shell loaded with collongite—in addition to incendiary shell which were of very little effect.

At this period, the "Vincennite" gas-shell appeared to have been perfected, but doubts still existed as to the stability of the gas and its probable effect in action.

In April, 1916, the various types of gas-shell had been definitely decided upon, and instructions issued for their use.

In regard to bombs. the question of the 58 mm. mortar had been settled, but the 240 mm. bombs did not appear to be suitable for special loading, whilst the problem of the 150 mm. bomb had not yet been solved.

To sum up:

Research and experiments in connection with special shell had been practically completed in April, 1916. Set-backs had been experienced which were probably due to a desire to reach a rapid solution of this difficult new prob-



lem, and to the too-hasty belief that every new type tested had definitely solved it.

The rapid progress made by the Germans in this direction was due, in the main, to two factors:

- (a) The German chemical industry was one of the most powerful in the world, and vastly superior to the French.
- (b) France had loyally observed the conventions she had signed and had never contemplated the possibility of the use of gas. She only embarked on this road with great reluctance, so as to be in a position to fight the Germans with their own weapons.
- (d) *Infantry Ammunition.*

On mobilization there existed 1,338,000,000 rifle and machine-gun cartridges, 366,000,000 of which were with regimental troops. The remainder was either in the ammunition parks or stored in the fortress supplies.

Under the programme of war manufacture, a daily output of 2,600,000 cartridge cases and bullets was provided for, and was to be reached on the 25th day. There was also a large reserve of both, so that the output of loaded cartridges was to increase gradually, during the same period, to 4,100,000 a day. The reserve would be exhausted after about three months, after which only 2,600,000 cartridges would be loaded daily, made up exclusively from the manufactured cases and bullets.

A daily output of only 3,400,000 cartridges was reached, and this was only exceeded much later on, when the number of cartridge factories had been increased.

This shortage of output during the first part of the war, as compared with the scale laid down in the mobilization plan, was due to the loss of the Douai cartridge factory, which ceased work on August 15, 1914, and also to the necessity of increasing the manufacture of shell fuses, which entailed the shutting down, shortly after, of the Bourges factory.

By January, 1915, the reserve of component parts was exhausted, so that the daily output of loaded cartridges dropped to 2,150,000, and below this figure in February and March. The matter was taken up in May. By November, it was anticipated that a daily output of 5,500,000 cartridges would be reached in August, 1916, which was judged sufficient.

The daily output mounted to 3,900,000 in March, 1916, and to 4,450,000 in April of the same year. By the end of 1916 the situation in regard to infantry ammunition had become so satisfactory that it was possible to make frequent supplies from stock to the Allied armies.

(c) *Grenades*

When trench warfare started, there were only two sorts of grenades in use: a 1914 pattern artillery hand-grenade made of cast iron, and grenades charged with melinite bombs or dynamite cartridges, which the armies had improvised.

In September, 1914, 22,500 Martin-Hall rifle grenades, which had been purchased in England, were taken over, "for want of anything better." In October, an order was placed for 100,000 of these "dangerous weapons," but their use was discontinued on account of the number of accidents.

Subsequently, 100,000 Aasen grenades (which could be either thrown by hand or fired from a mortar) were ordered, and 200 mortars. As hand-grenades they were satisfactory, but did not give good results when fired from mortars. Trials were then carried out of a special Aasen grenade for use with mortars.

Numerous experiments were carried out which resulted in the production of various weapons and, in the end, the supply to the fighting troops of suitable grenades.

As a result of trials which were carried out in May, 1916, the conclusions arrived at were:

- (a) To retain only two types of hand-grenades in service: an offensive bomb and a grenade. Both had a fuse action and an automatic lighter.
- (b) To evolve an attachment by means of which the grenade could be fired from the rifle to a distance of between 45 and 160 yards, if possible with the 86 D bullet.
- (c) To replace the fused V-B grenade by the D.R. percussion rifle-grenade, as soon as it had been made more accurate and less likely to damage the rifles.
- (d) To retain the pneumatic bomb-throwers in service, and to bring them into general use.
- (e) To develop the use of the A. B. incendiary bombs, which were either hand-thrown or discharged from a pneumatic thrower.
- (f) For carrying grenades, to adopt a light box holding from 12 to 50, and which could be opened without any tool.

#### SUPPLIES TO THE ALLIES

Some of these supplies had to be undertaken virtually at the beginning of the war, before the French factories had been expanded sufficiently to satisfy their own requirements.

#### RUSSIAN ARMY

The following were supplied on various dates between January and December, 1915:

Large numbers of 76 mm. shell. Starting at 2000 a day, this supply reached 100,000 for the month of May, 1915, and 225,000 for the month of June and the following months.

200,000 detonating fuses and many tons of powder.

37 mm., 105 mm. and 280 mm. guns, and 80,000 Kropatchek rifles.

After its long series of disasters, the only heavy artillery remaining to the Russian Army at the end of December, 1915, was:

84—105 mm. guns

389—120 mm. "

141—155 mm. howitzers.

The following were handed over to them:

- (a) 60 long 120 mm. guns with an initial supply of 30,000 rounds and a further daily supply of 300 rounds.
- (b) 25 6-gun batteries of 90 mm. guns with an initial supply of 120,000 rounds, and a further monthly supply of 50,000 rounds. This monthly supply was to be increased to 72,000 as soon as the French daily output reached 12,000 rounds.
- (c) 25 4-gun batteries of 75 mm. guns, with 3,000 rounds per gun. This was to be carried out as soon as the French programme of reconstituting the 75 mm. batteries was completed.

"It is quite certain that, without this help, the Russians would never have been able, in June, 1916, to launch the offensive which brought the Austrians within a hairsbreadth of destruction, and which shed a last ray of glory on the armies of the Czar."

#### BELGIAN ARMY

In the very first weeks of the campaign, the situation of the Belgian Army was such as to compel it to ask France for large supplies of guns and ammunition.

At the request of the Belgian Government, a Protocol was drawn up on November 12, 1914, which fixed the basis of supply to their army. The main provisions were:

- (a) *75 mm. ammunition*—A supply of 10,000 rounds a day every 5th day, as from November 1st. This rate of supply to be subject to revision when the Belgian army had more than 150 field guns in the line.
- (b) *120 mm. ammunition*—A supply of 4000 rounds a month.
- (c) *Other calibres*—A single supply of 2400 rounds of 95 mm., of 10,000 rounds of 105 mm. and of 24,000 rounds of 155 mm., together with powder for making up a similar number of charges.

Arrangements were also made to supply high explosives, powder, shell-fuses, material for one group of long 120 mm. guns, one section of 75 mm. motor-guns, motor machine guns and 100 machine guns.

The Belgian Army made every effort to obtain the necessary supplies of artillery ammunition elsewhere. It was so far successful that, after a last supply of 60,000 rounds of 75 mm., it agreed on February 24, 1915, to forego the daily supply of 2000 rounds, which had been fixed by the Protocol.

In June, 1915, 24—58 mm. trench guns were made over to the Belgians, together with 3,600 rounds a month.

The following additional supplies were made between August and November:

- 4,000—65 mm. shell
- 30,000—75 mm. shrapnel shell
- 8—220 mm. howitzers with 16,000 shell
- 1,000—105 mm. shell

10,000—120 mm. shell  
 1,000—155 mm. " "

Finally, in March, 1916, a supplementary supply was made of 1000—75 mm. shrapnel shell a day for 3 weeks, and of 12 short 120 mm. guns, 1890 model.

#### BRITISH ARMY

Supplies to the British Army were limited to:

300—90 mm. guns, together with 200 rounds a gun. These were returned to France at the beginning of 1916.  
 50,000—Japanese rifles and 20 million cartridges.  
 52,000—75 mm. shell.

A first supply of 36,000 rounds for the 14 batteries of 75's which were handed over to England by the Portuguese. This was followed by a further supply of 20,000 rounds a month, a total in all of 1,200,000 rounds.

#### SERVIAN ARMY

Immense assistance was rendered to the Servian Army. Its supplies, of every description, were completed and maintained from the beginning of the war up to December, 1915. During the period of this army's inactivity, little help was needed, but supplies had to be renewed and increased when the Central Powers opened their offensive in the autumn of 1915.

In the course of their retreat to the Adriatic from the Save, the Danube and the Morava, the Servian armies lost almost the whole of their material. It developed on France to save the remnants of this army, to feed them and convey them to Corfu and Bizerta, to build them up again and, finally, to transport them to Salonika.

It was found possible to form 6 infantry divisions out of the remnants of King Peter's army which survived the disaster and the subsequent epidemic of typhus. France undertook the equipment of this army.

In the first place, the following were supplied:

100,000 rifles, model 1907-15, for infantry,  
 20,000 " " 74 for artillery, drivers, etc.  
 900 muskets " 92 for divisional squadrons.  
 5,000 automatic pistols.  
 72 machine-gun sections, 1907 type.  
 100 Asen mortars with 25,000 grenades.  
 6 —6-gun batteries of 58 mm. trench guns.

Each division was to have 2 groups of rapid-fire field or mountain guns, and a group of 80 mm. mountain guns, to be replaced eventually by the 65 mm. rapid-fire mountain gun. For this there were supplied:

1 group of 70 mm. Krupp mountain guns (from Morocco),

- 2 groups of 75 mm. Schneider-Danglis mountain guns,
- 9 groups of 75 mm. Schneider field guns, 1912 model,
- 2 batteries of 120 mm. Schneider howitzers (a third battery was supplied later on),
- 6 groups of 80 mm. mountain guns.

The Main Artillery Park of the Army of the Near East was to undertake the supply of ammunition.

#### NEUTRAL COUNTRIES

Considerable efforts were made to assist both Italy and other countries. The following table gives an outline of these additional supplies:

ITALY		
60 guns 120 mm. long.	500 rounds per gun. Further supply—5 rounds per gun per day.	7 batteries by May 7th, the last 8 by May 22nd.
80-95 mm. guns and 120 ammunition wagons.	500 rounds per gun. Total further supply 2-300 rounds per day.	Delivery by groups of 4 batteries, between April 24th and May 15th. Ammunition delivered before May 10th.
600 machine guns, 1907 pattern.	Initial supply—10,000 rounds per gun. Further supply 1500 rounds per month.	200 in March and 400 in April.
HOLLAND		
12 guns 155 mm. long, 1877 model.	300 rounds per gun.  Nitro-cellulose powder for fortress guns—50 tons. Powder for field guns—50 tons. Trinitritoluol—20 tons.	As supplies became available, and on the condition that the existing programme of manufacture for the French armies was not delayed.
ROUMANIA		
1 battery 120 mm. long.	500 rounds per gun.	Guns and 200 rounds per gun despatched on April 8th
3 batteries 120 mm. short, 1890 model.	10,000—150 mm. loaded shell. 30,000—105 mm. loaded shell.  200,000 cartridge-cases for 75 mm. high explosive shell.	ditto ditto
90 machine guns, 1907 pattern.	10,000 cartridges per gun. Further supply—1500 a month.	Delivery started on May 1st.

## ROUMANIA—(Continued)

	50,000 Roumanian cartridges. 12,000,000 stampings, 5.- 000,000 revolver cartridges.	} Supplied by private manufac- ture.
	400,000 cartridge-cases for 75 mm. high explosive shell.	
	400,000 cartridge-cases for 75 mm. shrapnel shell.	

## SWITZERLAND

A number of 120 mm. long.	1000 rounds per gun, of which 500 D shell and 500 long shell.	
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Two Reports made by General Dubail in the case of General Sarraill

GROUP OF ARMIES  
OF THE EAST.

Headquarters, July 20, 1915.

The General Commanding  
No. 149/C.  
Personal and Secret.

From: General Dubail, Commanding the Group of Armies of the East,  
To: The General Commanding-in-Chief.

I have the honour to reply as follows to your personal and secret letter of July 16th, handed to me by Major Pichot-Duclos, regarding the command of the Third Army during the operations from June 30 to July 14th, 1915.

I. *The German Attack on June 30th.* This attack was preceded for several days by a very violent bombardment, and could not have been a surprise to the Third Army. It was carried out on a wider front than the former attacks. From the start, however, it was seen to be a very serious affair (report dated June 30th, 08.00 hours).

The XXXII Corps was obliged to sustain the action with its own troops. The only action the Third Army took was to forward supplies of ammunition and, on the evening of June 30th, to advance nearer to this Corps the detaining points of the 1st Brigade of the 128th Division.

The General Commanding the Third Army declares that the XXXII Corps had no need of infantry, and that it had at no time need of rifles, "which it had never asked for." Although the XXXII Corps did not ask for reinforcements, it is difficult to admit that they would not have been useful. The Corps was obliged to hold the line of the Biesme with the 94th Brigade and a portion of the 80th; if the Army had taken over the defence of this line, these troops, which knew the ground perfectly well, would have been available to the General commanding the XXXII Corps for a counter-attack.

As a matter of fact, the depth of the German attack was so small that a counter-attack, carried out by 5 or 6 good battalions familiar with the sector, would have had good prospects of success. This reinforcement seems the minimum which the Commander of the Third Army should have given to the XXXII Corps, which would at least have enabled it to employ all its resources. The consequences might have been *very great*.

In any event, the General commanding the Third Army could only appreciate the situation as it developed. He could not be sure, at the outset, that the General Commanding the XXXII Corps would not, in such a serious affair, make any request for reinforcements. He should have anticipated his requests, in any case, to the extent of ensuring that the whole of his forces were at his own disposal.

*Was it possible?* The General Commanding the Third Army states that he had *no reserves in his own hands*.

This in itself is a serious criticism of General Sarraill's conception of command, to which I will revert further on.

General Sarraill did not wish to take into account the brigade of the V Corps, which was in Army Group reserve in the valley of the Consance. It was not that he thought it could not be employed since, on July 13th, he did so without waiting for my authority—under the circumstances, he acted rightly. He said it was because it was too far away on June 30th, and he knew that, on July 1st, a brigade of the 128th Division, which had been moved up by railway, would be available. That, in effect, is the reply which the Chief of Staff of the Third Army made on June 30th to my Chief of Staff in regard to the intervention of the brigade. This is not strictly accurate as, if this brigade had been moved by motor transport, it would have been available much earlier than General Riberpray's first brigade.

In any event, there was a brigade of the 125th Division in the valley of the Biesme, above la Chalade, and this brigade could have furnished immediate reinforcements to the XXXII Corps or, at the very least, occupied the line of the Biesme. It was a matter for the General Commanding the Third Army to move this brigade behind the XXXII Corps.

The reason General Sarraill did not do so was, he says, because the troops are distributed entirely by sectors, and that the units in the second line in each sector are intended for reliefs and not for employment properly speaking as reserves. This conception is based on the necessity of limiting fatigue and of employing in each sector only such troops as are familiar with them.

Pushed to such a limit, this theory is untenable. It is recognized that its object is to remedy the dispositions of the XXXII Corps which; General Sarraill considers, lead to troops being too frequently mixed up, and to those resting being too rapidly worn out by frequent alarms.

The result, however, is that the Higher Command is reduced to impotency, and confines itself to laying out parallel lines of trenches, divided up into water-tight compartments. Naturally, army reserves, just the same as other troops, can be used as reliefs—it goes without saying that they must not be warned on any unimportant occasion—but they must be in existence and moved to the necessary spot as soon as a battle is really engaged. This han-

ding of reserves is a matter for the Army Commander: there is no doubt that action was lacking in this essential respect on June 30th.

On the other hand, the General commanding the Third Army asserts that "his infantry could not be properly supported by the artillery because, on this date, the artillery of the XXXII Corps had only 298 rounds per 75 mm. gun." This is absolutely incorrect, so far as regards supply of 75 mm. shell. The Third Army's own states show that, on the morning of the 30th, there were 87,500 rounds of 75 mm. shell for 263 guns. Taking the other Corps as having, at the most, the same as the XXXII Corps (and there is evidently no reason why the other Corps should have had more than the XXXII), there was an army reserve of at least 9000 rounds. By using this reserve at once, the *initial* supply of the XXXII Corps would have been increased to more than 430 rounds a gun. Now, it was possible for the General commanding the Third Army to decide on this at once for, before 9 a. m. on June 30th, I had notified him of the despatch of 3 fresh lots (telegram 3384 dated June 30th at 09.00 hours, following an earlier telephone message), to which were added 6 further lots (telegram 2403 dated June 30th at 21.40 hours). The Chief of Staff of the Third Army had been encouraged not to restrict his demands and he has twice since stated to me that he was never short of 75 mm. ammunition. Ammunition for heavy artillery has also been sent him in large quantities. In view, therefore, of the want of foundation for it, the argument regarding ammunition is astonishing.

II. *The German Attack on July 13th.* The part played by the General commanding the Third Army on July 13th was quite a different one. On being warned that the attack was imminent, he had the brigade, which was in group reserve, of the V Corps, moved by motor transport and placed at the disposal of the General commanding the V Corps, without even sparing the time to ask my consent. The action of this brigade was decisive and enabled the situation to be restored. The German attack was broken up while the offensive, which was projected for the 14th, was not compromised or even weakened. I fully approved the action, under the circumstances, of the General commanding the Third Army.

III. *The French Attack on July 14th.*

(A). *The general plan.—Conduct.* Two different operations were possible as a reply to the German attack on June 30th. The one a converging attack on the Tour de Paris region, by the V and XXXII Corps, somewhat reinforced; this would have been aided by the enfilade fire of the greater part of the batteries of the two corps. The other an enveloping action west of the Argonne which, in the event of success, would have enabled the German positions to be taken in rear.

The General commanding the Third Army dismissed the first solution which would develop into forest fighting. He considered that, for such fighting, sufficient artillery preparation could not be made, and that our inferiority in matériel would not enable us to secure the advantage. He, therefore, chose the second solution.

All the same, in order to prevent the offensive from being so extended as to conflict with the general plan of operations, the scope of the enveloping



movement was reduced. On July 1st the objectives of the Third Army were fixed as Servan, and the saddle-back 172 with a final concentration on la Grurie. On July 2nd these objectives were limited to the reoccupation of the line IN, to be attained by an energetic offensive within the zone of the XXXII Corps.

In support of the second solution, there was every justification for hoping that it would be possible to mass powerful means in certain portions of this zone, particularly to the west of the Argonne, and to effect a crushing surprise. Unfortunately, there was no concentration of effort, and the operations of the Third Army were reduced to parallel, and even somewhat divergent, attacks.

From the operations, the 15th Colonial Division and the 128th Division were to reinforce the Third Army. General Sarrail placed them under the orders of the General commanding the XXXII Corps, to whom he entrusted the conduct of the operations. He judged that, if he were to retain the general direction of his army, it was inadvisable for him to exercise direct command over a portion of it, especially as 8 battalions of the V Corps were to undertake an important diversion. As a matter of fact, the attention of the Commander of the Third Army was concentrated during July 13th and 14th more particularly on the V Corps, as a result of the German attack in the region of the Haute Chevauchée. It is none the less true that there were disadvantages in entrusting to a Corps Commander, with only a Corps Staff, and that already rather worn out, the conduct of an operation by 4 divisions, of which 2 were new ones, especially when the Corps Commander was already being blamed for his regrettable tendency to mix up his units.

In order, therefore, to avoid this, the Army Commander himself fixed the distribution of the troops. The result was a too rigid plan and the withdrawal from the Corps Commander of a great part of his initiative and freedom of action.

(B). *Preparation.* Personal and Secret Instructions No. 910/3 of July 5th laid down the distribution of the XXXII Corps and its two extra divisions as follows: 15th Colonial Division on either side of the Vienne—le Château—Binarville road, on a front of about two miles; on its right the 128th Infantry Division, on a front of about a mile; the available portions of the XXXII Corps artillery more to the right, up to the Tour de Paris. Instructions No. 923/3 of July 9th, with direct reference to this distribution, were limited to laying down the objective as the line of the IN prolonged to the left by the works in the Bois Beaurain. No other manœuvre was indicated except that progress was to be made in the direction of the Binarville road in order to take the Chêne salient in the rear and support the advance in the Argonne.

But the dispositions laid down in Instructions No. 910/3 were hardly such as to facilitate this manœuvre, in view of the length of front allotted to the 15th Colonial Division. Furthermore, obsessed as he always was by the fear of units being mixed up, the Army Commander wrote to the Corps Commander on July 10th (Letter No. 927) laying down that the task of each divisional commander was to push "straight ahead," and that each of them was to "retain all his troops at his own disposal and to employ them as he thought fit."

The result of such instructions was to preclude, from the outset, the possibility of any serious manœuvre; to embarrass the commander of the XXXII Corps and to lead inevitably to divergent action by the different units. On the other hand, if the Army Commander intended the action of the 15th Colonial Division to be the principal one, there was absolutely nothing in the Instructions to this effect and, furthermore, the length of front allotted to this Division made it difficult for it to carry out any decisive operation.

The date for the attack had been fixed in the first place for July 12th. Great activity had been displayed in the preparation of the ground which, by the 10th, had so far progressed that completion could be counted upon for the 12th. The same could not, however, be said as regards artillery registration. (Please see my letter No. 140/C of July 11th.) Following on a request from the Commander of the XXXII Corps and a telegram from myself, General Sarraill decided to postpone the attack to the 14th. In his judgment the preparation was sufficient, and he did not consider it possible further to delay the attack without running the risk of being forestalled by the Germans. In view of the German attack on the Haute Chevauchée on the 13th, this appreciation is shown to have been correct.

By the 14th, the preparation can be said to have been sufficient. It had been very closely watched by the staffs of all formations, and more especially by Major Pellegrin, the Army Liaison Officer with the XXXII Corps.

A comparison of old and up-to-date sketches (which sketches were verified by one of my liaison officers) shows the amount of work that was carried out. There appears nowhere to have been any lack of communication trenches, "jumping-off" places or rallying-points. In addition to this, detailed reports furnished me by the 15th Colonial Division go to show that adequate arrangements had been made for the supply of grenades, tools, sand-bags, barbed-wire, etc.

In regard to the artillery preparation, the fact that, on the left, the infantry was able to gain the German trenches in one bound shows that it was adequate on this side. It was, however, insufficient on the centre and right. It is clear that the divergent attacks were in part responsible for this. Other contributory causes appear to have been difficulties of observation, and the bad-quality fuses of the 120 mm. and 150 mm. guns. Of these some 75 per cent failed to explode, as I reported to you in my letter No. 147/C of July 18th; this, of course, was only demonstrated at the moment of the attack.

I do not, therefore, consider that any blame attaches to the Army Commander or his subordinates in respect of the preparations, nor of having hurried forward the attack without waiting for the preparations to be completed.

(C). *Action of the Higher Command on the 14th*: Generally speaking, the operations of the 14th can be said to have consisted of direct attacks, more or less energetic and more or less successful on various parts of the front. In no formation was any concerted movement attempted. The Corps Commander seems to have been wanting in decision in not pushing up his reserve brigade more rapidly behind the left brigade, as soon as news was received of the successful attack on the Bois Beaurain. One battalion only from the

reserve was placed at the disposal of this brigade, and that very late in the day—at 3.20 p.m. I consider also that he should have seen that Colonel Guérin, who was entrusted with this attack, made every possible use of all his troops, and took advantage of the temporary occupation of the northern edge of the Bois Beaurain to attempt to carry out the flattening of the right of the Chêne salient with troops other than those in the attacking line.

However, it is only fair to him to say that it was difficult to obtain clear and detailed information in time. Also that he was justified, from his repeated experiences of the preceding days, in anticipating severe admonition from the Army Commander if he engaged his reserves too hastily and mixed up his units. Moreover, he insisted most energetically on the renewal of the attacks and paid special attention to artillery fire being concentrated on the objectives. In regard to the Army Commander, his initial dispositions made any action on his part almost impossible. He had, in effect, delegated the conduct of the attack to the Commander of the XXXII Corps, and had canalized in advance the action of each large unit. The whole of his attention was, moreover, concentrated on the situation of the V Corps, which seemed most serious on the morning of the 14th. He went to that Corps first of all, after having detailed one of his staff officers to proceed to General Duchêne's headquarters.

IV. *The Reports rendered by the Third Army.* The reports for June 30th seem to have given a correct impression of the fighting on that day, but that is not the case in regard to the events of July 13th.

No report was made by the Third Army staff prior to a cipher telegram, received at 4 p.m.,<sup>2</sup> requesting ammunition and reporting that a very serious action had been in progress since 10.30 a.m. between Marie-Thérèse and hill 263.

The Army knew, however, at 6.30 a.m. that the attack was to be expected at 10.30 a.m., and had acted very promptly in moving the brigade of the V Corps, which was in Army Group reserve. The ensuing reports on the 13th did not give a true picture of the engagement: little ground had been lost—redoubt 263 did not appear to be seriously compromised—the heavy losses suffered by our 1st line were not mentioned. The impression given was that the enemy had obtained a very limited success and had been pinned down, thus assuring a maximum degree of success to our attack for the following day.

On the 13th, a liaison officer had been sent at 2 p.m. from my Staff to the Third Army. It was only on the 14th, after having seen the Commander of the V Corps, that he formed a decidedly unfavourable impression of the previous day's fighting. A clear idea of this was, it appears, not formed by the Army Commander either until the morning of the 14th. I consider, therefore, that, on the 13th and 14th, faulty information was supplied by the Army Staff to superior authorities in regard to the fighting on the 13th. I took this matter up personally at the time.

To sum up, with a view to preventing units being mixed up and troops

<sup>2</sup> News of the attack did, in fact, reach my Staff about 2 p.m.; but this was the result of a request for information made by them.

unduly fatigued, General Sarrail has finished by adopting a much too simple solution of the problem. By virtue of this, rigid zones are laid down for adjoining divisions, while the Army Commander retains no important force in his own hands. All the troops in the 2nd line are detailed for reliefs. As is perfectly correct, these reliefs are the dominant factor in the ordinary routine; but that they should continue to be so, as they are, in operations of the most serious nature, is a very dangerous conception and one which deprives the Army Commander of the possibility of any effective action on his part.

The passive attitude, to which the Army Commander was consequently reduced, is demonstrated by the German attack on June 30th and the French offensive on July 14th. There is no doubt that the first would not have resulted in a defeat if the Army Commander had supported the XXXII Corps—it is even asserted by some who took part in the action that it would have been transformed into an important success. The second did not succeed because all efforts were directed strictly on parallel or divergent lines.

On the other hand, the Commander of the Third Army showed himself as a real leader on July 13th. On this date he discarded his customary ideas and took steps to parry the German thrust without compromising his offensive on the following day. By so doing, he limited, on that occasion, the results of the German attack.

DUBAIL.

Group of Armies  
of the East.

July 20, 1915.

The General Commanding  
No. 150/C.

*Personal and Secret*

From General Dubail, Commanding the Group  
of Armies of the East

To the General Commanding in Chief.

*Reply to personal and secret letter of July 16th in regard more especially to the state of morale of the Third Army and the methods of command of its Commander.*

General Sarrail displays force of character and energy; but this energy assumes a hard and even brutal form in his relations with general officers who do not stand high in his estimation, although his intentions are excellent and he has a sensitive nature.

It is evident that he has several times been wanting in amenity in regard to Generals Humbert, Duchêne, Gouraud, Bonfait and Berge. On the other hand, he has always shown the greatest good-will towards General Micheler, and much kindness to Generals Heymann, Corbillet, Deville and Valdant, to mention only those of whom I am certain. He maintains that this attitude is based solely on the military worth of these Generals.

The excesses of severity are, however, a matter for regret, as their effect is to paralyze energy, initiative and devotion to duty. They create, moreover, a want of confidence and a feeling of unrest which are augmented by a certain

partiality in respect to the subordinate ranks. Examples of this are, Major Fontenay, appointed to the temporary rank of battalion commander and mentioned twice in despatches without having left the Army Staff; Major Devinet, appointed Chevalier<sup>3</sup> as a reward for long service, whereas he appears to have merited this by reason of his acts on the field of battle; paucity of rewards to the XXXII Corps, etc.

General Sarraill cannot be accused of want of activity. He makes frequent visits to his corps and divisional commanders. This I can vouch for personally. There is no doubt that personal contact of this description facilitates supervision and serves to stimulate flagging spirits; but he gives verbal, and therefore indefinite, instructions too often, and does not confine these to tactical matters. His visits are not always conducive to encouragement and this is especially the case in respect of the XXXII Corps on account of his harsh treatment of General Duchêne.

I should add that this Corps Commander acts in a similar manner towards his own subordinates.

General Duchêne is very nervous (natural character aggravated by six months hard fighting in the Argonne). Although animated by the best intentions, he wears out his staff as well as his subordinates as much by his unreasonable demands and his feverish and sometimes blundering activity, as by his purposely surly manner. He appears frequently to need calming and encouraging by his Army Commander. The latter, however, in spite of the energy constantly displayed by the XXXII Corps and its commander, finds fault too freely, which is not calculated to lessen General Duchêne's nervousness.

It has to be admitted that there exists a want of mutual confidence between the Army and the XXXII Corps, and between this Corps and the smaller units. Certain acts are even characterized by subordinates as practical jokes. The result is a sort of uneasiness which is added to the physical fatigue and nervous tension caused by the stubborn nature of the fighting.

General Sarraill reposes the utmost confidence in his Chief of Staff, and allows him an initiative which, from the tactical and technical point of view, can be said to be excessive. On the other hand, no use is made of the commanders of the army artillery and engineers.

Colonel Lebouc makes an intelligent Chief of Staff of high ability. He is very calm and confident, and from this point of view, exerts a good influence on his Army Commander. He has a good knowledge of the army's theatre of operations, and it is incorrect to say that he has never made any personal reconnaissance on the ground. It is true that he does not go about much, but I know that, in the last attacks, he went to see the Commander of the XXXII Corps to arrange matters with him, and also personally helped to establish liaison between the Artillery and Infantry.

Colonel Lebouc has great self-confidence and does not brook being contradicted. He himself writes out all the orders and reports, scarcely making any use of his 3rd Bureau, which appears only to have learnt of certain opera-

<sup>3</sup> Of the Legion of Honour.—Translator.

tions through the Corps. This would explain the want of preparation in some of the studies or operations.

There is a lack of mutual confidence between the Chief of Staff and his officers: in particular, the Chief of the 3rd Bureau feels that he is not always treated with good-will.

Practically no use is made of the Assistant Chief of Staff, which reduces still further the efficiency of this staff.

In regard to his personnel, General Sarraill persists obstinately in the extraordinary idea that his recommendations will be opposed. This explains why he refuses sometimes to express an opinion about his subordinates, or refrains from asking for those officers to be replaced who are considered incompetent.

It is impossible to approve an attitude of this description. He complains, moreover, of withdrawals made from his army, and considers that the resulting situation is not without danger. The difficulties of the tactical situation are not, in his view, adequately appreciated. Fantastic though the idea may be, he would seem not far removed from reading into this a want of good-will towards himself.

What conclusion can now be drawn from this inquiry? In the Third Army, there is certainly a feeling of uneasiness which must be stopped. The most radical means of doing so appears to me to change the Army Commander and the Chief and Assistant Chief of Staff. I am most distressed in having to make this recommendation as to General Sarraill whom I hold in the highest esteem; but I cannot evade what I consider to be my duty.

The services of such an active leader should not, however, be lost, and I request that he should be given the command of an army detachment. There would be every advantage, for instance, in his effecting an exchange with General Humbert, so long as he was spoken to appropriately in regard to his manner of command.

The Army Commander and the Chief of Staff would not, naturally, be changed at the same time, but at a suitable interval.

DUBAIL.

## APPENDIX TO PART IV

### RUSSIA—ITALY—ROUMANIA—GREECE

#### THE ARMY OF THE NEAR EAST

The lack of unity of command affected the Coalition to a far greater degree than the Central Powers, grouped geographically as they were in a single block. On the other hand, the forces of the Coalition were divided into three distinct camps: the French front (including Italy), the Near East and Russia. Liaison between the Western Powers and the armies at Salonika was maintained with relative ease, but at heavy cost and with an undue drain on shipping facilities. Communication between the Western theatre and the Russian Army, however, was only possible intermittently by the cold northern sea or by the Far Eastern ports and Trans-Siberian railway.

This inferiority could only be offset by timely concerted action, which Marshal Joffre was instrumental in arranging at the Allied Conference at Chantilly in December, 1915.

To be effective, this agreement had to be implemented, and it devolved on the Marshal to bring about the required co-ordination. His difficulties were undoubtedly very great, as his action was necessarily confined to persuasion of the Allied commanders who, in some cases, were generals of equal rank with himself; in others, the actual heads of States. Little trouble was experienced in regard to the British, thanks to the loyal co-operation of Lord French and Sir Douglas Haig, and to the Belgians, whose army took a very small part in the operations of 1916.

*Russia.* Difficulties arose in 1915 when, after its disastrous retreat, the Czar assumed personal command of his army. The departure of the Grand Duke Nicholas to take command in the Caucasus was esteemed a great misfortune both for Russia and the rest of the Allies.

General Alexieff had been appointed Chief of Staff and commanded in the absence of the Czar, but he did not enjoy in the Russian Army the prestige of the Grand Duke Nicholas, although all credit is rendered to his probity and devotion to duty.

The decision of the Czar to take the conduct of operations into his own hands is considered by the Marshal to have contributed more than anything else to precipitate the downfall of that unfortunate sovereign.

*Italy.* The situation in Italy was complicated. Good communications between the respective fronts facilitated a combination of the operations of the

Italian Armies and those of the Franco-British forces. But Italy had only declared war in May, 1915, against Austria Hungary, and paradoxically enough, she was still at peace with Germany at the time of the Chantilly conference in December, 1915.

The initial operations of the Italians were, therefore, mainly connected with those of the Russians and, in a lesser degree, with the Servian and Salonika operations. A glance at the map of Europe will show the difficulty of carrying out concerted actions on the Isonzo and the Upper Vistula. The proof of this was seen in the spring of 1915, when the Grand Duke Nicholas attempted to launch first a Russo-Servian offensive, and then a Russo-Italian one.

Nevertheless, the interdependence of the Russian and Italian fronts was evident during the year 1916, and it was the offensive launched by Broussiloff's armies which halted the Austrian attack in the Trentino in May.

So long as Italy had not declared war on Germany, she was separated, strategically, from France, in spite of the geographical situation.

Marshal Joffre met General Cadorna, the Italian Commander-in-Chief, for the first time in the summer of 1915, in the course of a visit to the Italian front, during which he was able to appreciate the difficult conditions induced by the mountainous country. General Cadorna is described as being very self-possessed and well-informed in regard to modern warfare.

In the course of subsequent meetings, Marshal Joffre gained the impression that General Cadorna's good-will and initiative were restricted by the political situation in Italy, which prevented all her resources in money and men being devoted to the war. The result of this was a lack of matériel, especially machine guns and artillery, and of means to equip the numerous classes of soldiers which filled the depots.

Following a meeting of the French Supreme War Council, at which Marshal Joffre's plan for combined offensives was approved, a conference of the Allied Commanders-in-Chief was held on March 12, 1916, at Chantilly. To defeat the great efforts then being made by Germany at Verdun to wear down the French Army, it was proposed that the attacks of the Allied Armies should be launched as soon as possible, but only when sufficiently prepared. The dates suggested were May 15th by the Russian Army and June 1st for the other armies. The rôles proposed for the various Allied armies in the meantime were, briefly, as follows:

*French*—to endeavour to stem the German rush and thus give the other armies time to complete their preparations.

*British*—to concentrate the maximum of its forces in France, by withdrawing divisions from Egypt.

*Russian*—to exert vigorous pressure on the enemy, with a view to preventing his diverting any units.

*Italian*—to act in the same way as the Russian Army.

*Army of the Near East*—to be reinforced by the reconstituted Servian Army. It would then be strong enough to immobilize large enemy forces and be in a position to take advantage of any favourable op-



portunity for an offensive, provided that its divisions were immediately organized for mountain warfare.

These proposals were unanimously approved. At the instance, however, of the British delegates, the question of the future employment of the Army of the Near East was reserved, although it was decided that it should be organized as far as possible with a view to mountain warfare.

On March 27, 1916, a meeting of representatives of the Allied Governments was held in Paris, at which the decisions, which had been approved a few days previously at Chantilly, were unanimously adopted.

In this manner the basis of action of the Coalition in 1916 was established

#### THE RUSSIAN PREPARATIONS AND THE AUSTRIAN OFFENSIVE IN THE TRENTINO

With the object of retaining the enemy reserves, the Russian armies of the West and North launched an offensive on March 20, 1916, on the front between Dvinsk and Vilia and in the Jakobstadt region. These offensives were at first successful, but although soon checked they had held up the reserves which the enemy maintained between the Baltic and the Pripet.

Some little time later, General Pau was replaced at Russian G.H.Q. by General Janin who, by his tact, ability and firmness, acquired great influence with the Russian Staff.

On April 14, 1916, the Russians decided to open their offensive on June 15th in the region of Minsk, with secondary attacks north of Dvinsk and south of Rovno. General Cadorna was at once informed by Marshal Joffre and requested to make arrangements to launch his own offensive at the same time.

In the meanwhile, on May 14th, the Austrians launched a heavy attack of 18 divisions on the Adige, the Altipiani and the Brenta, operating from their base in the Trentino.<sup>1</sup> Previous to this, in March, some small local attacks had been made by the Italian armies on the Isonzo front, but without any appreciable result.

Information had been received by the Italian High Command of the successive reinforcement of the Austrian forces in the Tyrol and the Trentino, but they do not appear to have been disturbed by this threat.

The Austrian attack forced the Italians back on a front of some 37 miles, and General Cadorna requested that the Russian offensive should be launched immediately.

Marshal Joffre did not at first consider that the position of the Italian Army was sufficiently seriously endangered to justify shortening the delay which was essential to the Russians for the concentration of troops and transport of munitions.

The Italian situation, however, rapidly became worse and, after a personal appeal by the King of Italy to the Czar and renewed requests from General

<sup>1</sup> For supplies of guns and ammunition made by the French to the Italians in March, 1916, see Appendix to Part III, page 606.

Cadorna, the Russians agreed to advance the attack of their left wing (General Broussiloff) to June 4th.

The launching of the Russian offensive constituted an argument against any delay in the British offensive on the Somme, while the attack on their front led the Italians to take early action themselves. The Austrian offensive in May served, therefore, the interests of the Coalition, in that it was the signal for a general Allied offensive. The Entente, thanks to the Chantilly agreement, was shown to be a coherent force, capable of striking back swiftly and on a large scale.

### THE SERVIANS

In October, 1915, the Servian army was in Corfu, engaged in the process of reconstruction and, on March 12, 1916, it was decided by the Allies that it should be transported to Salonika, commencing on April 1st.

Owing to difficulties with the Greek Government, no move across Greek territory was possible and the transport was made entirely by sea, 7 divisions having been disembarked by June 7th. After some discussion, the Servian Army was placed under the command of General Sarrail.

The question of reinforcement of this army by its own nationals was also taken up. The Servian Government desired to recruit volunteers from among those who had formerly emigrated to the United States, Russia and Italy. The United States advanced her neutrality as a reason for refusing, Russia the difficulties of transport; Italy would not discuss the question, which remained unsolved during 1916.

### GREECE

After the installation of the Allied forces at Salonika, instances of ill-will on the part of the Greeks became so frequent and so flagrant that, at the end of March, General Sarrail was led to request authority to proclaim a state of siege at Salonika. The French were in favour of this measure, but the British Government had at this time not lost hopes of conciliating the Greeks. The occupation by the Bulgarians on May 26th of Fort Rupel and the Demi-Hissar region not only compromised the security of the Allied forces, but also demonstrated the complicity of the Greeks. In the face of this situation, the French Government authorized General Sarrail, on May 30th, to declare a state of siege.

The situation rapidly grew so much worse that England, France and Russia came to an agreement in regard to an ultimatum, supported by an Anglo-French naval demonstration, to be presented to Greece. In view of an intimation by King Constantine that he was prepared to yield, the ultimatum was delivered by the French, before the arrival of the Allied fleet. In the Marshal's opinion, it was regrettable that the demonstration of force did not take place. From this moment, all idea was abandoned of inducing Greece to side with the Allies, whose efforts were limited to preventing any harm being done to their cause, as to which a rude shock was to surprise them in December, 1916.

## THE INTERVENTION OF ROUMANIA

One of the reasons advanced by Roumania for delaying her decision was that of munitions. Marshal Joffre had notified the French Premier in March, 1916, that a solution could easily be found to this problem.

In April, 1916, although a Servian army of 120,000 men had made its reappearance, the Bulgarian Premier (M. Bratiano) declared that his country could not enter the war until a Russian army had started operations in the Dobrudja.

Discussions, with Marshal Joffre endeavouring to conciliate the conflicting views of the Russians and Roumanians, continued until the end of June. At this period munitions and war material were about to arrive in Roumania and the Russian offensive was nearing the Carpathians. That the moment was a decisive one was appreciated by the Roumanian General Staff, who informed Marshal Joffre that they were prepared to fix the first day of mobilization 40 days before the guaranteed date of arrival of the first train-load of munitions at Yassi—anticipated for July 15th.

Although the question appeared to have been settled, it was another two months before the first shot was fired by Roumania.

## THE ITALIAN OFFENSIVE

The immediate results of the Russian offensive, carried out on the demand of the Italians, were magnificent. The Austrian armies crumpled up with the result that the attacks on the Trentino were brought to a close at the beginning of June. Towards the end of the month, the Austrians carried out a retirement in the Trentino, and the Italians re-occupied the greater part of the lost ground.

On July 13th, the Marshal telegraphed to impress on General Cadorna the necessity of shortening as much as possible the interval between the cessation of hostilities in the Trentino and the opening of the general Italian offensive on the Isonzo.

By the end of July, new Austrian divisions made their appearance on the Russian front withdrawn successively from the Italian front, while the Italian High Command had not yet decided on the date of its attack nor the size of the forces to be employed. General Cadorna finally reported that he proposed to attack on August 15th on the Isonzo with 225 ~~battalions~~ <sup>regiments</sup> against 119 Austrian battalions.

The combination of efforts on all the principal fronts of the Allies was now complete, but the Italian offensive was unfortunately launched a good month too late. The Austrians had had time to take measures of precaution in the threatened sector while, on the Russian front, they had been saved from disaster by the aid of the Germans.

The difficulty of co-ordinating Russian and Italian action on two such inter-dependent fronts, is a proof that the direction of the Entente operations was far from being based on a solid foundation.

## THE ROUMANIAN CAMPAIGN

No attempt is made to give a detailed account of the campaign in Roumania, concerning which Marshal Joffre's remarks are confined to an explanation of the action taken by himself.

Although the assurance had been given that the Roumanian mobilization would start at the beginning of July, it was further postponed by M. Bratiano who demanded an increased regular supply of munitions, an extended and intensified Russian effort in Galicia and the Bukovina, the launching of an offensive by the Army of the Near East, and the support of a Russian army in the Dobrudja.

Marshal Joffre endeavoured to obtain satisfaction on all these points, but was unable to enter into any engagement concerning the Army of the Near East, in view of the opposition of the British Government. However, this opposition was shortly after modified and, so soon as the Marshal learnt that the British forces at Salonika were to be organized for mountain warfare, he felt able to promise the support of the Army of the Near East.

Matters in regard to the supply of munitions by the French were settled, but there then arose the question of a military convention between the Russians and the Roumanians. Acting through General Janin, his representative in Russia, the Marshal bent his efforts to obtaining the adhesion of the Roumanians to the views of the Russian General Staff. The former favoured an immediate offensive against the Bulgarians, while the latter pressed for the principal Roumanian operations to be directed against the Austrians in conjunction with, and under the direction of, Broussiloff's left wing.

At a conference held by Marshal Joffre in Paris on July 23rd, a convention was drawn up and accepted (in the case of Russia and Roumania subject to further approval) by the chiefs of the Russian, Servian, Italian and Roumanian Military Missions.

Further excuses were advanced for delaying the entry into action of the Roumanian Army until, finally, Marshal Joffre telegraphed to Bucharest and Russian G.H.Q. to the effect that Roumania must give a decision within 4 days. If the agreements were signed within that period, the Army of the Near East would take the offensive 72 hours after the signature, while the Roumanians would be required to attack the Austrians 10 days later.

In the result, the convention was signed by M. Bratiano on August 17th and, on the 18th, Marshal Joffre issued orders to General Sarrail to attack the Bulgarian forces on the 20th.

However, on the 18th, the Bulgarians themselves launched an attack on the British front on the Struma, and on the left of the Franco-Servian front in the direction of Vodena. The enemy reached the eastern bank of the Struma and captured Florina, but was brought to a standstill on the 20th. He failed to cross the Struma and to secure the Lake of Ostrovo position which covered Vodena on the west.

Marshal Joffre had to intervene to allay the apprehensions which had been aroused not only of the Roumanians, but also of the French Government, by

this attack. His efforts bore fruit in that Roumania declared war on Austria on August 27th. On the same day, the First and Second Roumanian Armies invaded Transylvania, while Russian forces crossed the Danube at Isaccea with the object of reinforcing the Roumanian Army on the Dobrudja frontier.

The moral effect of the first reverses inflicted on the Roumanians in the Dobrudja by the forces of Marshal Mackensen necessitated fresh action on the part of Marshal Joffre.

On September 11th, he requested Alexieff to send at least two more divisions south of the Danube at once. A few days later, he proposed that the Roumanians should organize a solid line of defence in the region they had slowly reached in Transylvania, and that the Roumanian troops thus set free, being supported by the Russians, should march against the Bulgarians, in combination with the Army of the Near East which had just retaken Florina.

Urgent representations were made to the Russians to adopt a more conciliatory attitude with the Roumanians, and a French Military Mission under General Berthelot was sent to Bucharest.

The Roumanian disaster was not, however, far distant. It began on September 29th by the defeat of the left wing at Hermannstadt by Falkenhayn. On October 8th, the Germans entered Brasso and the Roumanians abandoned the whole of Transylvania. On October 19th, Mackensen defeated the Roumanians in the Dobrudja, seized Constanza and stood ready to join up with Falkenhayn on the other side of the Danube.

This alarming news induced Marshal Joffre to renew his requests to Alexieff, who took over a part of the Roumanian front to which he also directed 3 army corps and a cavalry corps.

Relations between the Russians and Roumanians continued very strained. The Marshal made a personal effort to improve the situation by appealing to Alexieff, at the Boulogne Conference on November 2nd, to renew a general Russo-Roumanian offensive against the Bulgarians, in conjunction with the Salonika forces.

However, the sudden advance of Falkenhayn in Wallachia in the direction of Bucharest caused the precipitate retreat of the Roumanian forces from Transylvania and the Danube. Mackensen had crossed this river and joined up with Falkenhayn's right.

In spite of the intense efforts made by Marshal Joffre, efforts which included a personal appeal (through M. Poincaré) to the Czar, no move was made by the Russians to aid the Roumanians who, on December 3rd, were put to rout. Two-thirds of Roumania, with its wheat and oil, remained in the hands of the enemy. The "forecasts" of Alexieff and Gourka were realized: "An entirely Russian front now extended from the Black Sea to the Baltic."

It was apparent to Marshal Joffre that a crisis, of which the effects were felt in France, was approaching in the Russian G.H.Q.

Up to the beginning of 1916, General Gilinski, the Russian Military representative at French G.H.Q., had maintained a perfectly correct attitude. Subsequently, various events caused the Marshal to lose confidence in this officer and, in September, he requested M. Briand to obtain his recall.

Marshal Joffre asserts that Gilinski, who himself never went up to the front, modified the reports of his officers with the French armies and, in his interviews with the Marshal, substituted his own views for those of General Alexieff, which he was supposed to represent. General Gilinski was recalled towards the end of October.

#### THE ARMY OF THE NEAR EAST

In accordance with instructions from Marshal Joffre, the Salonika forces, in the month of March, 1916, carried out various movements with the object of inducing the enemy to believe that an offensive was imminent. This did not, however, prevent the Germans from withdrawing practically the whole of their forces from the Macedonian theatre.

Following on the decision of the Chantilly Conference on March 12th, the organization of the French troops in Salonika for mountain warfare was completed on July 1st. The re-organization of the British troops was more difficult to obtain, the British Government being opposed, in principle, to any operations in the Balkans.

It appeared to Marshal Joffre indefensible that an Allied force of 300,000 men should remain inactive, at a time when a general offensive was about to be undertaken. He, therefore, occupied himself with the question of a genuine attack by that force, as soon as the Servian Army had rejoined it. General Sarrail's plan comprised an attack along the whole of his front, for which he demanded 5 or 6 extra divisions, as against the Marshal's desire for a strong attack on one selected part.

A meeting was held at Beauquesne between the French and British, at which the question of a Salonika offensive was discussed. The British were totally averse to the despatch of further troops to the Near East, and even suggested the recall of 2 British divisions to France.

In the meantime, the Bulgarians crossed the Greek frontier and, with the connivance of the Greeks, took possession of Fort Rupel and the high ground on the left bank of the Struma.

The result of this was the visit of M. Briand and the Marshal to London, to endeavour to obtain the assent of the British Government to an immediate offensive in Salonika. This mission was unsuccessful, in that the British Government maintained its decision to postpone an offensive in that theatre. It was agreed, however, that the British forces should be re-organized for mountain warfare, but this was only to be completed in September. At the same time, it was laid down that the British Commander, General Milne, was placed under the orders of General Sarrail only for the defence of the town and port.

Marshal Joffre was, therefore, constrained to prescribe an attack by the Franco-Servian forces alone, with the object of pinning down the Bulgarians on the Greek frontier and of facilitating Roumania's entry into the war. As soon as he learnt that the organization of the British forces in Salonika for offensive operations was to be pushed forward, the Marshal instructed General Sarrail to draw up a plan comprising the indirect cover of the Roumanian

mobilization and concentration, and an action in combination with the Russo-Roumanian troops south of the Danube, with the object of crushing the Bulgarian forces. The plan provided for a general offensive by all the Allied contingents, the principal operation being entrusted to the French and Servians in the Vardar region.

The Marshal had for some time been anxious about the direction and staff work of the Army of the Near East. Learning that General Sarrail, although Commander-in-Chief of this Army, also exercised direct command of the French divisions forming part of it, he proposed the appointment of a General to command all the French forces. In agreement with General Sarrail, the post was assigned to General Cordonnier, who departed for Salonika at the beginning of August.

With Joffre's approval, General Sarrail modified his plan, as a consequence of the Bulgarian attack on August 18th, to an attack on the enemy right wing with a view, in the first place, to the re-establishment of the Allied front. The Allied offensive recaptured Florina and forced back the Bulgarians towards Monastir.

The Marshal's efforts were then directed towards inducing the British and Italians to reinforce their contingents. At the conference held in Boulogne on October 20th, it was decided that the French forces should be increased to 6 divisions (including 2 Russian brigades) and the British to 7 divisions. Representations were to be made at Rome to endeavour to have the Italian contingent increased to 3 divisions.

The French and British engagements were carried out. Marshal Joffre met General Cadorna on November 7th at Saint-Michel-de-Maurienne, but could obtain no definite undertaking from him in regard to the Italian forces.

On November 18th, the Bulgarians evacuated Monastir, but this was the last victory in 1916 of the Army of the Near East. No further advance was possible on this side, nor could any forward move be made on the Vardar, which operation had been prescribed on November 22nd in conformity with the decision of the Chantilly Conference.<sup>3</sup>

Immediately after this, a new situation was created by the decisive defeat on the Argès. On December 6th, Sarrail was instructed to organize a solid defence of his front and, on the 11th, Marshal Joffre gave orders for the offensive to be brought to a close.

Marshal Joffre asserts that the entry of Roumania into the war would have produced greater results, and his own task would have been considerably lightened, if his efforts had been better seconded by General Sarrail. He recognizes that the latter had a very difficult mission to fulfil, entailing as it did an inexhaustible store of tact and a generous understanding of the mentalities of the different nationalities composing the Army of the Near East.

Much space is devoted by the Marshal to instances of friction between the various Allied Commanders and General Sarrail, his lack of military talent, his frequent differences with General Cordonnier and personal assumption of the direction of local operations. Joffre proposed on August 25th that General

<sup>3</sup> Conference of November 15, 1916.—For details see Part IV, Chapter IV.

de Castelnau should be sent to Salonika to conduct an inquiry into the general situation of the Allied Army and Sarrail's fitness to command it.

The question was under consideration by the French Government for a long time and eventually assumed a distinctly political character.

In the event, the Government decided on October 25th to despatch General Roques, the Minister of War, to carry out the inquiry at Salonika. Marshal Joffre entered a very strong protest against this decision, which he considered as infringing on his authority. M. Briand explained that the appointment of General Roques would be useful and was the plan which he had devised for getting rid of General Sarrail. At M. Briand's request, therefore, the Marshal withdrew his protest.

In the meantime, complaints were received from Alexeieff and Cadorna regarding the faulty arrangements at Salonika for the supply of the Russian and Italian troops. In fact, the Italian Commander-in-Chief stated that the conditions were such that it would not be possible to consider sending the 3 extra brigades which the Marshal had requested.

On November 12th, General Roques despatched a telegram to the French Government, in which he gave the conclusions he had arrived at. These were, in brief, that General Sarrail was as active and intelligent as before and, with a first-class Chief of Staff, perfectly fitted to assure the preparation and execution of the proposed plan of operations. In regard to the Allied staffs, General Roques reported a frank cordiality with the Italian, Servian and Russian Commanders and some reserve, but no hostility, on the part of General Milne. He concluded by saying that nothing that he had discovered in the course of his inquiry could lead him to recommend General Sarrail's removal.

As can be imagined, this report gave Marshal Joffre very great concern and he at once went to see the acting Minister of War, who informed him that M. Briand was inclined to adopt General Roques' point of view and to let the matter drop; which, as a matter of fact, was what happened.

It would appear that from this moment dated the campaign to withdraw from Marshal Joffre the supreme command of the French Army of the Near East, a campaign of which the final result was the resignation by the Marshal of his post of Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies.





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